

THE SHADOW OF A HAIR

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THE SHADOW OF A HAIR

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Even a single hair casts its shadow

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THE SHADOW OF A HAIR

CHAPTER I

IT had been raining all day in Penang and in the hills that towered above that picturesque town. Not the gentle showers or furious storms of the temperate zone, but the sullen sheets of warm, grey water indigenous to the tropics. Rain glistened alike on the red tiled roofs of Chinese temples and the golden domes of Mohammedan Mosques, and like a dingy curtain veiled the usual shimmering blue of the Straits of Malacca. Idle Malays from the doorways of their woven bamboo huts philosophically watched the flooding of their little gardens and the overflowing of their rice paddies. The downpour had polished the heavy green foliage of the jungle that choked the valley and crept up the steep sides of the mountain; had stilled the chattering of monkeys and sent into leafy exile the scarlet minivers, the long-tailed argus pheasants, the bright cockatoos and the gaudy parrots. Even the sinuous pythons had coiled their wet, shining lengths in the thickest recesses of the tangled creepers that knit together the tall meranti trees, the thorny rattan and clumps of bamboo. On the mountain top,

the rain had swept clean the roofs and wide verandas of the big hotel, and flooded the winding paths which, like arteries, connected the main building with its four scattered bungalows.

Because of the leaden skies, night had fallen with more than its usual suddenness. Lights sprang up in the little town below, and a few minutes later more lights tried vainly to penetrate the darkness that separated the clapboard buildings on the hilltop.

In three of the four bungalows, there was the cheerful bustle and stir of guests dressing for dinner, shrouding their evening clothes in raincoats before venturing into the storm that swept between the cottages and the central dining-hall.

In the isolated fourth bungalow, a girl in a soiled lavender tea gown bent her bright head over a bedside table. The room was dark except for the patch of light that streamed through the door opening into the living room. Her fingers groped across the wicker table top. She thought she could put her hands immediately on the little box she was seeking. "I've found it," she called to the visitor she had left in the other room. A board creaked behind her. Startled, she whirled. "You frightened me—I didn't hear you come in here." Her apologetic little laugh died away at the sight of the grim figure behind her. Terror stared out of her blue eyes as something slipped over her head and clung to her creamy throat. Just once she screamed, a scream that echoed through the bungalow and was lost in the storm outside.

Oom Chang, one of the Chinese room boys, ploughed through the rain, his black sateen trousers clinging to his thin, yellow ankles, water running up the sleeves of his white coat as he attempted to balance a huge, covered tray under an oiled-paper payong. Every few minutes he had to step aside into the encroaching shrubbery and creepers to permit someone to pass, and his soul was filled with bitterness. Why couldn't the Australian mem in his bungalow go decently to her meals, instead of forcing him to make several trips through the rain with her food. Surely if her friend, the little dancing mem, could fight her way through the storm to the dining-room, the big one should be able to manage the trip. None of the other guests had sent for their dinners. He alone, of all the boys, was unfortunate. He still smarted at the memory of their grinning yellow faces as he had sullenly loaded the tray with the food ordered by her friend. If she was too sick to go to the hall, she was too sick to eat so much food. Heap the tray as cleverly as he might, it would take two trips to complete her dinner, and to make matters worse, her bungalow was the farthest of them all, perched on the very edge of the steep plateau, a good five minutes' walk from the dining-hall, and eight minutes' walk on a night such as this. There wouldn't be any tips either, if he was any judge of human nature and circumstance: their clothes and baggage were shabby; their bill was overdue, and they did their own laundry in hot water he had to carry down to them in big

tubs from the hotel. Why couldn't he have had the bungalow of the big Englishman and his wife and stepdaughter,—the people with the sparkling jewels and beautiful luggage—or of the young American tuan and his sister? Their trunks, too, were heavy with richness. Even the Goodrich family would be better to serve, though their little boy was a veritable limb of satan.

On he plodded through the darkness and rain, his flat, bare feet skidding on the red mud that was once a path. Suddenly a figure loomed ahead of him, a black shape so wrapped in a long dark coat that Oom Chang couldn't tell whether it was a man or woman. Carefully he tested the balance of his tray before stepping off the narrow path, but the oncoming figure swerved aside and past him. Could it be that the Australian mem had changed her mind and decided to go to the dining hall after all? It would be just like her! "Mem!" he said softly. There was no answer, but the figure seemed to gather speed and hurry around the bend in the trail. It couldn't have been the mem after all, or she would have spoken. Perhaps she had had a visitor, or perhaps it was just one of the crazy foreigners out for a walk in the rain. No sensible person could ever tell what an American or Englishman would do.

Oom Chang continued his slow pace. Soon the light would show through the trees to guide his steps along the remaining fifty yards which were slightly down-grade, and the most difficult of all on such a night.

Now the dark bulk of the house loomed before him. He could smell the wet, sweet odour of the frangipani thicket, and the jasmine that trailed over the veranda rail. His feet clung to the slippery steps and awkwardly he elbowed open the screen door into the living room. Fortunately the table was in its accustomed place near the door, and with a long sigh of relief, he lowered the tray from his tired arms. Silently he groped his way to the electric light switch, and a second later the room leaped into view. His little beady eyes narrowed in disgust at the disorder of the place; the torn magazines littering the wicker couch, the cigarette stubs and ashes sprinkled around the floor, the overturned chair, the worn, satin shoes and crumpled underwear and dresses sprawling from the open wardrobe trunk. He gave a grunt of satisfaction. The mem must be packing to leave. He'd report to the head boy when he went back. Not that she could hope to get away without paying her bill. The only way down from the Penang Hills was on the little cable railroad beyond the hotel, and it would take at least four sweating coolies to move her barang to the train.

It was strange that the mem hadn't called out to him, he thought, glancing at the partially opened door of her bedroom. Usually she was lying in wait to order him about, "hot water! ice water! whisky sodas! food!"—anything to cause him more trouble and more weary footsteps.

"Mem!" he called softly. There was no reply

Louder he called, and then still louder, but save for his own voice and the beating of the rain on the flat roof, there was not a sound. Perplexed, he strained to see through the half open door into the room beyond, but his little almond eyes couldn't penetrate the darkness. The mem must be sleeping very soundly. He had seen the bar boy grumblingly start out with a bottle of whisky for her not long before. If Oom Chang woke her, she would be angry, but, on the other hand, if he let her dinner grow cold, she would make him take the tray back and change her food. At the thought of an extra journey through the rain, he found courage to move into the bedroom, and his voice was louder and more imperative than it had yet been. His muddy feet became entangled in more clothes—silk things on the floor. He swore under his breath. If he had soiled them, he would have to pay for their laundering out of his own scanty earnings. There was something queer about the bungalow to-night. It was so dark and quiet. Even the storm outside seemed to be suddenly hushed. A chill crept up his backbone and bristled the wiry black hair on his neck. Dimly he felt that he was the only person in the room. Perhaps, after all, it had been she who had passed him on the path. Desperately he took a couple more steps, and reaching his hand to the switch, pushed the button. For a second he stood blinking at the sudden illumination. There was no sign of the mem anywhere. The floor in the bedroom was littered with garments from the small

trunk and suitcases which gaped empty. The door to the little stoneflagged bathroom was open, and the light from the bedroom showed that there was no one there. The mem had gone off in the midst of her packing, but it was queer packing, even for such as she; this dumping of bureau drawers and clothes chest on to the floor. Everything she owned must be there, trampled and tumbled as though she had stirred them all up with a stick.

The little Chinaman shook his head in perplexity as he turned out the light and returned to the living-room. As he stood uncertain whether to stay or leave, a gale of wind whirled through the house, shutters banged, clothes eddied wildly about, papers danced through the air, and rain swept in through the open door and windows. Hurriedly he slammed the door, and rushed from window to window securing the shutters in the living-room and the bedroom he had just left, then into the room of the little dancing mem where the storm was still frolicking. In the darkness he fought his way to the windows and slammed close the shutters. Now he had to mop up the water that had swept into the room with the wind. He grumbled to himself as he found the switch and turned on the light, and then a "Wah!" of surprise escaped him. The Australian mem was there, lying on the bed, or rather her body was on the bed, her head with its shower of bright yellow curls hung over the side where the mosquito netting had been torn apart.

Reluctantly he approached. If she had fainted, he would have to do something for her, though he didn't know just what. The women of his race didn't faint. His warm, wet clothes seemed suddenly cold, and another chill shook his meagre frame. He wanted to turn and run, but if she complained that he had left her so, he might lose his job. He forced his reluctant feet to carry him to the bedside, and with a puzzled frown stooped over her. Then suddenly the Oriental inscrutability of his yellow face seemed to break into a thousand pieces. A hoarse cry came through his dry lips as he lifted the drooping head and stared into the black, swollen face that had been hidden under the golden veil of hair. Screaming he ran out into the storm.

CHAPTER II

ALTHOUGH dinner was half over when John Townsend entered the big, brilliantly-lighted hall, only six of the white-clothed tables were occupied that rainy night. No transient guests from the town below had braved the elements, so the soft-footed Chinese waiters had only the regular hotel guests to serve. John's tall, well-knit figure, his bronzed face and close-cropped moustache became the focus of all eyes as he stripped off his burberry and limped slowly toward the empty table assigned to the Townsend brothers. His keen, grey eyes glanced over the heads of the other guests: the attractive American girl and her young brother, Carol and Bob Courtney; the successful, middle-aged Englishman, Henry Pennington, his wife, Lady Emily, and stepdaughter, the lovely and well-publicized Diane; the bride and groom, Dick and Madge Stevenson; the lonely figure of the little Russian dancer; and the most recent arrival, the flashily-dressed George Blake. Oblivious of them all, his steady gaze rested on the sleek, dark head of Helen Goodrich, who with her husband and obstreperous young son was seated in the back of the room. John had nearly reached his table before Helen looked up and permitted her anxious eyes to meet his. Almost imperceptibly he shook his head. It seemed to him

that her slim shoulders sagged as she turned to her son and said mechanically, "Eat your vegetables, dear. You can't have any dessert until you have cleaned your plate."

"There goes Imperial England, eh what?" Bob Courtney grinned at his sister. "There'll be some fun when his brother barges in. He's been having himself a quiet little binge this afternoon."

Carol's eyes were grey icicles. "I don't see anything funny in that situation, Bob. John Townsend has been doing his best to keep his kid brother straight, and the moment his back is turned, the little worm dashes for the bar and grabs a bottle."

Bob gaped at her. "What's the matter with you? Got a crush on the old boy, or something? Where's your sense of humour? If you could have seen Gerry Townsend and his bottle playing hide and seek with Sir Galahad there, this afternoon, you'd have thought it funny too." He chuckled at the memory.

Carol flushed and bit her lip.

"Gosh, Sis, what's got into you?" Bob went on, his voice plaintive. "You get a kick out of the rest of the gang here—the female dreadnought and the way she keeps her little craft in tow." he nodded disrespectfully toward the impressive figure of Lady Emily. "And the clinging bride and sturdy groom over there. Are you off your feed or something?"

The American girl shook her head, unable to explain even to herself the rush of sympathy she felt for John Townsend.

“Anyway, you’d better snap out of it before the big number comes on. Look, he’s watching the door now, and sitting on the edge of his chair. I wonder what she will pull on him to-night.” Carol glanced back at the uneasy figure of Clarence Goodrich, who, oblivious of his wife and son, was staring in fearful expectancy at the front door. A faint smile touched the corners of her mouth. “That’s different,” she said; “I don’t mind seeing him baited. I don’t like men with a roving eye and a wet, red mouth. I don’t see how his wife stands it.”

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Again Bob chuckled. “It won’t be long now, or I miss my guess. I should say one more meal where he is the target for Katherine’s wisecracks will send him trotting obediently down to the bank for her passage money.”

“Do you suppose she is really trying to blackmail him?” Carol asked. “I thought she was just getting a bit of her own back. Showing him that if she was good enough to play around with in Singapore, she was good enough to acknowledge in Penang.”

“Sometimes your innocence appals me, Sis.” Bob’s tone was disgusted, but before he could enlarge on the subject his attention was distracted by the opening of the front door. Once more everyone glanced up expectantly from their plates. Clarence Goodrich’s fork clattered noisily to the stone floor, and then he

drew a sigh of relief. It wasn't Katherine Lowell who entered, but the stiffly held figure of Gerry Townsend. Carefully he removed his raincoat, and with glazed eyes made for the table where his brother was waiting.

"Hello, old man," he said in a loud, aggressive voice. "Sorry to keep you waiting, but I had an important 'gagement." John stared at the good-looking youngster who slid into the opposite chair, and for the thousandth time wondered what more he could do for him. The hunting trip to Siam had been a last resort, and he thought it had been successful. Gerry had been a delightful companion, seeming to enjoy every minute of the three weeks in the jungle, making light of discomforts, and promising over and over again that he would keep straight. He had looked so brown and fit when they had reached Penang and decided to spend the week-end here in the hills before taking the Monday boat back to Singapore that John had thought the jungle had accomplished what his father and England, and he and Singapore had failed to do. Only too well he knew what was now in store; the ugly taunting, Gerry's eyes becoming more and more unfamiliar; pallor spreading from his mouth and whitening and ageing the boyish face. It was going to be difficult to avoid a scene, and he had all the English loathing of conspicuousness.

"What have you been doing with yourself this afternoon? Foul weather, isn't it?" His voice was casual and friendly.

For a moment Gerry's eyes were blank, as though he were trying to remember something, and then he shrugged. "Really couldn't tell you. What were you doing? Having a tête-à-tête with the fair Helen? That's good!" He snickered. "Helen of Troy. Paris and Agamemnon! You haven't the guts to be Paris though. Agamemnon's more your style. After all, Clarence got her away from you. How long ago was it? Fourteen years? I was just a little shaver, but I remember. Mother telling me I mustn't mention Helen's name to you, that she had married the other chap, and the Guv'nor going around with a long face. You were the family hero then, back from the war, and crocked up. You could have had anything. And what did you do? Moped around England for a couple of years and then came crawling out here after Helen. Not that it's done you any good!" He chortled maliciously, and then glanced from John's set face to the untouched plate in front of him. "I don't want anything to eat." Petulantly he pushed the food aside. "You aren't very good company to-night, John. Think I'll go up and sit with the little dancer. Her girl friend's given her a miss. Nice little piece of goods, what? But she's cold—not like most Russians."

"Better wait and get some coffee." With an effort John controlled his rising temper. Gerry, who had started to rise, sank back in his chair, but John's order to the waiter was drowned in the sudden banging of shutters and slamming of doors as a ferocious gust of wind swept through the room, whirling cloths and

napkins and cloaks from chairs and tables, eddying chits and papers from the desk where the Chinese clerk presided, clattering silverware on to the imitation marble floor. Chinese boys dashed madly from window to window struggling to fasten the swinging blinds and shut out the fury of the storm, while the waiters in their baggy black trousers squatted about the floor retrieving the scurrying articles and trying to sop up the puddles of rain.

"It's a Sumatra!" John shouted above the tumult to Gerry who looked sick and shaken. "I thought it was blowing up for one. By George! hear those trees crashing outside!"

It was ten minutes before order was restored and the disrupted service resumed. The guests had just begun to concentrate again upon their dinner, when with a loud bang, the front door burst open, and the dripping, terrified figure of Oom Chang swayed on the threshold. With his entrance the storm again raged through the room, undoing all the labour of the painstaking waiters. Three boys rushed to force shut the heavy front doors, while an indignant head boy and the Chinese clerk shouted imprecations at the intruder. Still blinking from the light, and oblivious of their anger, Oom Chang staggered to meet them, his voice shrill with horror as he jabbered incoherently in his native tongue.

At his words, the head boy and clerk forgot their indignation. Their faces paled to the shade of old ivory, and their staccato voices yelped incredulous

questions at the waiter. All eyes were fixed curiously on the trio of Chinamen, and every ear was strained to catch some inkling of the news which had so broken their phlegmatic calm.

“What’s all the fuss about?” Gerry complained. “I want my coffee.” His hazel eyes opened very wide as he noted the frozen expression on his brother’s face, and saw him rising impetuously from the table. In half a dozen strides John was beside the Chinamen addressing them in Malay. They seemed to turn to him in relief, and all three volubly began to explain in a mixture of Chinese and Malay, their voices rising above the tumult of the storm until even those at the farthest tables who had a knowledge of the languages caught the import of their news. A murmur of dismay swept through the room as the Chinamen’s scattered words were incredulously translated. “Woman is dead! That Australian actress!”

Chairs were hastily scraped back, and napkins dropped as people crowded to the front of the room to gather further details. Chinese boys and waiters, neglecting their work, cowered together in a chattering group. Only the Goodrich family, and the Penningtons remained at their respective tables. Clarence Goodrich, heedless of the noisy appeals of his son for permission to join the other men, and of his wife’s worried gaze, clutched the table with whitened knuckles as he strained to hear what was being said at the far end of the room. At the other table, Lady Emily slowly took up her lorgnette and surveyed impassively the excited,

gesticulating groups of guests and servants. Diane, who had started to rise, shrank back into her chair at an imperious gesture from her mother. Henry Pennington regarded the scene dispassionately as he continued to enjoy his curry.

"What has happened to Katherine?" Hester Page demanded, pushing her way into the centre of the little crowd. "That's our waiter. It can't be Katherine you say is dead!"

John Townsend turned to her, "I'm afraid so, Miss Page."

"Why, she can't be," Hester protested. "I was talking to her just before I came up here. I sent the waiter down with her dinner. There must be a mistake."

"I wish there were." John's grave eyes were pitying. "The boy's story seems to be straight. She must have committed suicide."

"Katherine commit suicide! Never!" Hester's voice was raised hysterically. "She was afraid to die! She was terrified at the very thought of death. What happened to her?"

There was an embarrassed silence, and then John said reluctantly, "The boy says she was strangled."

"Strangled!" Hester shrieked, "Then she was killed. Some one of you murdered her!" Against the low moaning of the storm, her words rang out wildly. Carol Courtney grew white, and for a moment leaned against her brother's broad shoulder. The little bride burst into tears and clutched frantically at her husband.

Lady Emily turned accusingly to her husband and daughter. "I knew we should have left this place to-day. If it hadn't been for your stubbornness, Henry, we should never have been involved in this disgraceful affair."

For a second Hester stared unbelievably around her, and then before anyone could stop her, with a muffled sob, dashed to the front door, flung it open, and vanished into the storm.

John hesitated, his glance seeking Helen, whose attention was concentrated on her husband's trembling lips and goggling eyes. It was the steady, expectant gaze of the American girl, and her little nod of approval that seemed to answer his question. He reached for his raincoat, as Carol spoke to her brother. "Go with Mr. Townsend, Bob—Hester mustn't go down to the bungalow alone." Together Bob and John hurried from the room.

"Where is the manager?" demanded Lady Emily. "It is an outrage to permit such a scene."

"He went down to Penang, Mother," Diane volunteered. "You can't blame those poor Chinamen for being in a panic."

"Well, someone ought to take charge," her mother declared in a strident tone, and then demanded. "Where are you going, Henry?"

Henry Pennington, having scooped up the last spoonful of rice, pushed back his chair deliberately. "You said that someone ought to take charge, and no one seems to be doing it. That English chap who

just went out seemed to be the only one with any sense. I'm a magistrate, at home, and it's rather up to me to take a hand."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," Lady Emily flared. "We can't afford to be mixed up in any scandal now. Think what's at stake!"

"That's why I'm going," he returned. "The Chinese have all lost their heads, and no one seems to be doing anything."

"You keep out of this affair," she ordered. "Thank God we don't know any of these people. They can't drag us into the newspapers over this."

"We'll be in the newspapers all right," Henry Pennington said grimly. "We are always news, my dear. You've seen to that. What I must do is see that we are featured properly. I'm going to get the police here, and I'm going to have that waiter locked up until they come." Ignoring his wife's indignant protests, Pennington walked to the front of the room. Diane hurriedly changed her appreciative giggle into a cough as her mother's injured feelings broke over her own curly brown head.

In the meantime, her husband was addressing the Chinese clerk. "Look here, where's the manager?" The terrified Chinaman pointed vaguely toward the valley, having apparently, in his excitement, forgotten the little English he knew. "Then phone up the police," Henry ordered. The little almond eyes blinked at the command, and then the sleek, black head shook, "No, no!" He groped for the strange words he wanted,

"Tuan Besar angry if police come. Bad business, the police."

For a moment Pennington was baffled. Never in his long, successful career had his orders been defied and, handicapped as he was by ignorance of the language and customs, he turned to Dick Stevenson. "Tell that clerk he must call the police. We can't have a murderer loose up here."

At the word murderer, Madge clung more closely to her embarrassed bridegroom moaning, "A murderer loose! Don't leave me, darling. We'll all be killed!"

Dick untwined her arms, "Hush, Kit!" and then to Pennington, "I think we ought to make some sort of search, don't you? We can't let the fellow get away."

Gerry, having temporarily pulled himself together, seconded the idea, "That's right. The murderer may still be hanging around down there at the bungalow. Let's buzz off."

Pennington hesitated. "The first thing is to send for the police," he said firmly, "And we must have that waiter locked up somewhere until they come. Don't any of you know the damned lingo?"

Helen Goodrich was leaning across the table saying in a low voice, "Clarence, go up with the other men. You're making yourself conspicuous by staying here. At least you can call the police."

"Mother, I want to go, can't I?" her son piped up. "Dad's afraid, but I'm not."

"You keep still!" Clarence shouted at the boy, and

then muttered in justification to Helen, "There's nothing I can do. Dashed silly going out in the storm and getting soaked."

"Mr. Goodrich!" Pennington's voice boomed down the room. "Will you come up and call the police? Tell this Chinaman here that he must lock up that waiter; that I will hold him responsible for his safe-keeping."

"Go, dear," Helen urged, and then with a glance at her husband's shaky hands and strained face, she called to the imposing Englishman who was trying to take charge, "I will get the police and talk to the clerk. Mr. Goodrich is going down to the bungalow with the rest of you." Without heeding her husband's protests, she hurried him up to the front of the room and watched him sulkily join the group.

"There's a woman with sense," Pennington commented as he heard her addressing the clerk in swift Malay. A stubborn look crossed the yellow faces, and the unfortunate room boy began a voluble protest. Her voice became soothing, explanatory, and after a minute the Chinese countenances brightened. They nodded approval, and with one accord moved toward the rear door.

Helen turned with a smile to Pennington. "It's all right, Mr. Pennington. They are going to lock up the waiter until he can tell his story to the police. I told them he must be kept safe so that the murderer can't hurt him, and now he can't wait to be shut up." Eager, small hands clutched her, and she

stared down into the freckled face of her ten-year-old son. "Clarence, you go right back and sit down in your chair. You can't come with me."

Carol stepped forward. "I'll look after the little boy while you telephone."

Pennington grunted his approval, and began buttoning his raincoat. "All right then, you fellows. Let's push off." As Clarence Goodrich moved after him, his arm was seized by the newcomer, Blake. "I don't know what it is all about, except that someone has been murdered, and the old chap there is organizing a man hunt. Who was killed?"

"A woman called Katherine Lowell," Clarence muttered, shaking himself loose. At an exclamation from the man behind him, he turned.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Did you say Katherine Lowell?" Blake asked through dry lips.

"Yes!" Clarence's voice was irritated. "An actress who was staying down in one of the bungalows."

"O my God! Katherine!" Blake's voice rose to a scream, and pushing past the bewildered planter, he plunged into the storm.

CHAPTER III

THE short journey from the hotel to the bungalow seemed like a nightmare to John, with the wind a solid bulwark against which he and Bob had to hurl themselves, while their progress seemed to be diabolically impeded by great branches strewn across their path. It was incredible that they didn't catch up with Hester—that such a slip of a girl could have fought her way so swiftly through the storm. Of course the path was familiar to her, and he had only been along it twice. He flinched from the memory of those other trips. They didn't bear thinking about just now. Through the eddying sheets of rain, they caught at last the glimmer of the lighted bungalow, and with a sigh of relief struggled on to the veranda where they stood gasping for breath before facing the horror that awaited them inside.

They found Hester crouched beside the bed, staring with wide, stricken eyes at the body of her friend. Gently John lifted her to her feet, while Bob quickly drew a sheet over the ghastly figure. Oblivious of their presence, Hester gazed around the room with a puzzled frown. "But why here?" she murmured to herself. "I don't understand why she was killed in my room." She pushed her fair wet hair back from her forehead with impatient fingers.

"You mean that this is your room?" John asked.

For the first time she seemed to be aware of the two men. "Yes, Katherine's is on the other side of the living-room. I ran in there first, and when I didn't find her, I thought the waiter was lying after all, and I was so relieved. Then I noticed the light in here—and found her." She shuddered, and for a second seemed on the point of breaking down again. Setting her quivering chin, she forced herself to continue. "I can't understand. She was in her room when I left. She would never have gone to bed here."

"Perhaps she came in for a book," Bob suggested.

Hester shook her head. "She never read anything but magazines and she knew the only books I had with me were some of Shakespeare's plays. She told me she was going to sleep until her dinner came. It was a strange thing for her to do. I can't help thinking that if we knew why she had come in here, we'd know who did this horrible thing."

John began to walk back and forth, his forehead knitted with worry. "Miss Page," he broke the silence abruptly, "have you any enemies yourself?"

The girl gave him a startled glance. "You mean—she may have been killed by mistake. That it should have been I?" John nodded.

"No, there's no one to whom I matter enough. My family and friends were all killed. We were White Russians. I alone escaped, and I took another name when I went on the stage. That was eight years ago. Since then the only friend I have had was Katherine."

She spoke matter-of-factly, and checked Bob's murmur of sympathy, with a hostile glare.

The sound of heavy footsteps on the veranda made them jump. John hurried into the living-room just in time to see Henry Pennington's massive figure in the outer doorway, and hear Gerry's eager, "Did you catch the fellow?"

John looked disconcerted. "I'm afraid we haven't looked for him. It never occurred to me that he might still be around."

Pennington came into the room, closely followed by Gerry Townsend and Dick Stevenson. "I don't believe he's here either, but it seems better to look the place over in case the waiter chap didn't kill her. There might be some clues or something." Together the four men surveyed the wrecked living-room.

"Nothing here, unless he's under that couch," Bob said crossing the room and stooping to stare underneath the cover. He shook his head in answer to their unspoken question, and rising went toward Katherine's bedroom. This time it was Henry Pennington who entered the room first and rapidly searched the wardrobe and the stone-flagged bath beyond, while Dick Stevenson knelt to peer under the disordered bed.

There was no sign of the intruder, but Pennington's keen eyes noted the muddy footprints of the waiter trodden into the mass of clothes. "That's where the boy came in, see!" He frowned as he studied the marks. "By Jove, that means the place was torn inside out

before he got here. If he had done it, his feet would have been wiped off on the floor before he started to rummage around." The other men regarded him with new respect, as he strolled back to the living-room and stared at the floor there. "Can't tell much about this room. Too many of us have been dripping and trampling over it. But, look! there by the table where the tray is, you can see his bare footprints again. It seems to me that this let's the boy out, but that will be up to the police." He straightened his bent shoulders. "I suppose the body is in the other room?" he asked John.

"Yes," John answered. "But I didn't notice any footprints there except the wet blobs we made. I'm afraid between us we tracked over any marks that might have been there." Pennington clicked his tongue in disapproval, but before he could make any comment on John's carelessness, footsteps were heard once more on the veranda, and George Blake burst into the room, closely followed by Clarence Goodrich.

"There's no use your coming in," Pennington said. "There are too many here now. I'm afraid we are complicating things for the police instead of helping them."

"Where is she?" Blake demanded fiercely, pushing past him. "Where's Katherine?"

Without stopping to notice the astonished expression on the faces of John Townsend and Mr. Pennington, he rushed into Hester's room and across to the bed. With thick, trembling fingers he pulled back

the sheet and bent over the twisted figure. "Katherine!" his voice broke. "I was too late, my girl. O my poor girl!" His knees seemed to collapse beneath the weight of his bulky body, and Bob, recovering from his surprise, hastily pushed forward a wicker chair to catch his sagging frame.

"Who the devil is he?" demanded Pennington of the people grouped silently around the room.

"I don't know," Hester murmured, gazing in perplexity at the stranger. "I never saw him before dinner to-night, and I never heard Katherine mention him."

"Better get him some water I guess," John suggested. "He's all in."

"I saw a bottle of whisky in the other room," Bob said. "I'll get him a shot of that." He hurried past Clarence Goodrich, who with eyes carefully averted from the tragic figure on the bed, was leaning against the door jamb.

"Have you any idea who could have done this terrible thing, Miss Page?" Pennington asked abruptly.

A stubborn, secretive expression crossed the girl's face. "I have an idea, but I won't tell anyone except the police." Her eyes resumed their feverish search of the familiar room as though she could tear the murderer's secret from the inanimate furnishings. Suddenly her lids narrowed, and she dashed across to the bed. Dropping on her knees she snatched something which had been concealed by the folds of the torn mosquito netting.

"What's that?" Pennington inquired curiously as the girl hastily shoved a small object into her raincoat pocket.

Her smile was inscrutable. "I think it is a clue. At least it is something that doesn't belong to me, or in my room. Don't worry," her tone grew cynical, "I'm not suppressing evidence. I'm merely keeping it safe for the police."

For a moment the older man was taken aback by her words, and then he protested, "I'm sure such a thought never occurred to me. Naturally you want to see your friend's murderer brought to justice."

"Naturally," agreed Hester. "And being in the minority in that respect, I'm not trusting anybody." Her eyes, suddenly hard and accusing, rested in turn on John Townsend's clear-cut profile, on Clarence Goodrich's twitching hands; on Pennington's hard mouth beneath his close-cropped grey moustache, on Gerry's unformed, boyish chin, on Dick Stevenson's shifting dark eyes, and lastly on the bowed, partly bald head of George Blake.

"It's taking that chap a long time to get the whisky," Henry Pennington broke the uncomfortable silence, "I'd like to hear what Blake has to say for himself when he comes to."

Clarence Goodrich turned his weak, handsome face toward the living room, and his eyes darkened as he saw that it was empty. Before he could comment, however, Bob Courtney came out of the far bedroom. Catching the suspicious expression on the planter's

face, he explained "I found the whisky bottle, but there was some dirt on the glass so I went into the bathroom to wash it off."

"Awfully considerate aren't you?" Clarence's voice was sarcastic. "What's a bit of dirt—if there was any dirt—when a man's unconscious?" Bob shrugged his broad shoulders, and without replying carried the glass of spirits across to the chair which held Blake's crumpled figure.

"Here, I'll give it to him." Pennington took the glass, and bending over, with surprising dexterity forced the burning liquor through the clenched teeth. Blake coughed and spluttered, and then mechanically seized the glass and drained the contents. Pennington reached down and swiftly drew the sheet up over the body of the murdered woman, and as Blake straightened up in his chair, inquired with solicitude, "How are you feeling now, old man? Able to talk?"

"Thanks for the drink," Blake replied with an effort. "Bally fool, to go to pieces that way." He looked around at the curious faces turned toward him, and, as realization came back, a shudder shook his body.

"You've had a shock. You must have known Miss Lowell pretty well," Henry Pennington's smooth voice roused him.

"Know her!" A sound half laugh and half sob broke through Blake's lips, "I'm her husband. Lowell was just her stage name. Katherine Blake is who she was. And, by God, if I knew the swine that did this, I'd

strangle him with my own hands." He twisted them realistically.

A murmur of mingled sympathy and surprise rippled through the room. Hester alone was quiet, and her expression sceptical. "Katherine never told me she was married," she said in a harsh voice.

"And who may you be, Miss?" demanded Blake.

"I was her best friend. Perhaps I should say her only friend. And it seems very strange to me that she never mentioned having a husband in all the months we've lived together."

The man glared at her. "Are you calling me a liar? What do I care what she told you? She may have had her own reasons for not trusting you. I married her eight years ago in Sydney. How do I know you aren't the one who did her in? A woman could have twisted that thing around her neck as easily as a man!"

"Stop wrangling!" commanded Pennington. "These accusations aren't getting us anywhere. The thing for us to do is to go back to the hotel. The police ought to be there by this time, and they are the ones to straighten things out. Come on, let's shove off."

Clarence Goodrich stood erect. "Yes, let's go. There's no use speculating here. After all, it must have been one of the Chinese boys who killed her. She was always ticking them off." He stopped abruptly as he realized that he had betrayed unusual knowledge of Katherine's habits.

Hester's face was hard. She seemed to have aged ten years since she had entered the bungalow. As

the men stepped aside to let her pass from the room, she hurled a Parthian shot. "It may interest you to know that it was not Oom Chang or any of the servants who killed Katherine." She tapped her pocket suggestively. "I have proof that it was a white man!"

CHAPTER IV

As the dining-hall emptied itself of men, Carol saw her small charge prepare to dash after his mother.

"Here, where do you think you're going?" she asked, catching his thin arm as he tried to dodge past her.

"I'm going with my mother. You let me alone!" He stared at her with defiant eyes.

"Oh no you're not. You are going to stay with me. Your mother has some business to attend to and you mustn't bother her," Carol said in a pleasant voice. "Come and finish your dinner."

"I don't want any more dinner. I want to hear what mother says to the police." He tried to squirm away from Carol's grasp. "I know what happened. Somebody killed that yellow-haired woman—the one father used to go to see."

"Come and eat your dinner," Carol commanded sharply, "And don't talk so much." With a firm arm she marshalled him to his table and twisted him into his chair.

"Think you're pretty nippy, don't you?" he scoffed. "But you don't know as much as I do. I know who killed that woman. I saw him go sneaking down there with my own eyes. And it wasn't that waiter chap either!"

"Saw whom?" Carol eyed him cautiously, uncertain whether or not to believe his boast.

"Never you mind." He grinned wisely. "I don't tell everything I see. If I did I could cause plenty of trouble, and don't you think I couldn't."

"A most unpleasant child," murmured Lady Emily surveying him through her lorgnette. "Precocious, no doubt, and spoiled by native servants. What he needs is a good English school to whip him into shape."

"Oh, is that so!" mimicked the boy. "Well, I don't look like a horse anyway." His pale eyes shifted from the outraged English woman to Carol.

"Do you think the police will come?"

"Of course," the American girl answered controlling her amusement.

"Well, I'm going to see what they said to mother." He jumped to his feet.

Carol reached out a tanned muscular arm and jerked him down into his chair. "Sit down, you little pest. If you try any more tricks with me, you'll be sorry."

For a second his face worked, and she expected to hear his usual roar of rage. Then a broad and appealing grin spread across his freckled face.

"You have a lot of muscle for a girl, haven't you?" His voice was admiring.

"You wouldn't be such a bad kid, if you just had someone to take you in hand once in a while," Carol replied, surprised to find her dislike vanishing.

He digested her remark in silence, and then said defensively, "Well, a chap has to do something. I'm

fed up hanging around with a lot of women all the time, being treated like a baby! Nothing to do! No one to play with! You'd be sick of it too."

"Perhaps I would," Carol agreed. "But I hope I wouldn't bully my mother and my governess the way you do, and make a general nuisance of myself. If you didn't act like a baby, they wouldn't treat you like one."

The youngster sat silent, swinging his feet for a moment before he said irrelevantly, "You know you aren't half bad for a girl." He eyed her speculatively. "I guess it's because you're an American. I have an American friend, Dave, you see, so I like them. He's a big fellow—he's twelve. That's how I know so much American. Did you notice it?"

"I thought you didn't talk like an English boy," Carol admitted.

"I learned it from Dave. Mother doesn't like it. She was glad when Dave's father went back to America, but I wasn't. We used to pal around together all the time." He sighed, "I never had a friend before." He leaned toward her confidentially and his face brightened, "As soon as I'm a little bigger, I'm going to run away to America and be a cowpuncher, Dave and me. Fight Indians and horse thieves; you know. It takes a long while to get big though. I've only grown an inch since Dave left, and if I don't hurry up he may get tired of waiting for me. There must be lots of chaps, big chaps in America, he could run away with."

"I'm sure he'll wait for you, though, Clarence," the girl assured him.

"Don't call me that. I hate it." He glanced at her shyly, "You can call me Mike, if you want to. That's what Dave and I decided to call me. You never heard of a cowboy called Clarence did you?"

"No, Mike, I don't believe I ever did," Carol said gravely, "but what about that man you said you saw? Were you just trying to pull my leg?"

He shook his ginger coloured head. "No, it's true. I did see him." He lowered his voice, "I'm going to try and catch him myself. I know all about detecting. Dave and I used to read about it in Edgar Wallace's books. I liked that woman too. She used to give me candy sometimes, and besides, I liked the way she used to go for my father. I don't like my father much. He's always crabbing at me, and he makes my mother cry, too, when she thinks no one can hear her. When I'm big enough, just before I run away to be a cow-puncher, I'm going to take a crack at him."

"You mustn't talk like that about your father, Mike," Carol reproved him.

"Well, then he hasn't any right to make my mother cry. I don't care much what he does to me, even when he licks me." He blustered a bit, "But mother's different. She's awf'ly nice, my mother is. We have fun together whenever he's away, but when father's home she's different."

"Never mind all that, Mike, tell me about the man you saw."

"Well, he was all wrapped up in a waterproof or something, and his face was hidden so I couldn't see it," the boy began.

Carol looked at him suspiciously, and he said hastily, "Honestly, I'm not baiting you. I'll tell you how it was: Mother told me to wait for her and father, but I was hungry, so I was going to cut along and get my dinner. Just as I came out of our path, onto the one that goes up to the hotel, I saw this chap coming. I didn't know who he was, and I thought it would be a lark to scare him, so I hid behind some bushes beside our path, and just as he passed, I jumped out at him." He giggled at the recollection. "He wasn't scared, not half! He put one arm up across his face, and he made a swipe at me with the other, but I dodged. It was raining cats and dogs, and I couldn't see where he went, but he was going along the path toward the bungalow where the yellow-haired woman lived. That was the only place he could go, because there's no house beyond ours except that one. He was a white man, too, 'cause I saw his hand when he tried to hit me."

Carol regarded him thoughtfully. His face had lost its slyness, and his pale, eager eyes under their sandy eyebrows, were raised frankly to hers. It was the sort of prank the youngster would play. There might be something in his story. "If I were you, Mike," the girl said in a lowered voice, "I wouldn't say a word about it to anybody until the police get here."

His homely little face lighted. "All right. But you'll let me tell the police myself, won't you?" Carol

nodded, and the youngster sighed happily as he dangled his feet. "There's something else I can tell them too," he said at length. "I was the first one in the dining-room, and I was watching everyone who came in, 'cause I wanted to get back at that bird for trying to hit me. He was big, I knew that much, but all of the men here are big, so that didn't help. But I figured that whoever was going down to that bungalow would be late to dinner, see? Of course I didn't know then that he'd killed her. If I'd thought he was going to do that I'd have tripped him up. I could have easily, and then I'd have sat on his head and yelled." He thought regretfully of his lost opportunity. "Anyway, four men were late: Mr. Pennington came in after the horsey woman and the pretty girl had started eating, and then the new fat man, then Uncle John—I call him that because mother told me to, but he's not really my uncle at all—he's much nicer. And last of all, there was his brother—the one who was so drunk and talked so loud."

Carol flinched at the memory of that conversation. "I don't believe it was any of them, Mike. They probably all had good reasons for being late. If it wasn't a native who killed her, it must have been a stranger."

"His hand was white," the child said simply, "and there aren't any strangers around. No one would come up from Penang on a night like this. It just has to be somebody here." Carol shivered, and then a wave of relief swept over her as she saw Helen Good-

rich approaching. The police would be coming soon now.

"I couldn't get Central," Helen said as she came up to the table. "The telephone seems to be out of order. The storm probably tore down the wire, so I wrote a chit and sent one of the Chinese boys off with it."

"Oh dear, it will take ages for him to get down to Penang and back with the police, won't it?" Carol exclaimed in dismay.

"Not if he gets a train right away. It is only about twenty minutes' run, you know. Let's see." She looked down at the diamond-studded wrist watch that Clarence had given her in a penitential moment. "It is half past nine now. They ought to be back by midnight anyway."

Under the direction of the worried head boy, the deft-fingered waiters had cleared away the partially consumed viands and arranged the tables for breakfast before they slipped away to their quarters for an excited discussion of the murder. The room was left to the possession of the women. Lady Emily, after forcefully expressing her indignation at the position in which her daughter and husband had placed her, had finally relapsed into silence. Diane mechanically played with the freshly-placed knives and forks, her thoughts on the attractive American boy down at the bungalow. She wished that she dared defy her mother and join the three younger women at the other table. Bored with the desultory conversation of Carol, his mother, and the little bride who had shyly slipped into

the chair next to him, Mike's head drooped lower and lower.

Suddenly a scream rang out through the startled room, and every eye turned to follow the shaking finger that Madge Stevenson was pointing toward the door. A small Chinaman emerged from the darkness and made his way toward them.

"It's only one of the boys," Helen announced soothingly, and then as he drew near enough to distinguish his features, she added in a tone of dismay, "Mercy, it's the one I sent for the police." Rapidly she addressed him in Malay, translating his sing-song reply to the anxious women. "The trains aren't running. Something has happened to the cable."

"For heaven's sake, what did he come back here for? Why didn't the idiot walk to Penang?" asked Carol.

A faint smile flickered across Helen's troubled face. "The Chinese don't do things that way. I only told him to take the train. Now I'll have to order him to go down the trail." Again she spoke to the boy, who nodded his understanding and reluctantly started off on his pilgrimage.

"Oh dear," moaned Madge Stevenson. "All that time wasted. It will be hours now before the police can get here. We may all be killed by that time. I wish Dick hadn't gone down to that dreadful bungalow."

Carol glanced at her impatiently. "There's no use crying. You are only getting your eyes and nose all

red. The men ought to be back any minute now." Hastily the little bride pulled forth a shiny new vanity case and, forgetting her fears momentarily, began to repair the damage done to her complexion.

"How long do you think it will take the police to get here now, Mrs. Goodrich?" Carol broke the brooding silence into which Helen had sunk. With an effort the planter's wife tore her thoughts away from the black fear that gnawed at her.

"It is bad going down that mountain trail and through the jungle, especially in this storm. I don't believe the boy can reach Penang in much under an hour. Then he will have to locate the police inspector, and whoever the chief will want to bring with him—a doctor and so on. It will probably take them over an hour to climb up the hill."

Carol looked at her watch. "It's after ten now. Ten minutes. That means the police can't get here before one o'clock."

Lady Emily snorted her disapproval and started once more a tirade on the inefficiency of the hotel management where such crimes could happen, at the guests who could be murdered, at the telephone system which couldn't withstand storms, at the railway that could break down, and particularly at Helen who hadn't the intelligence to properly direct the Chinaman. Diane, flushed and uncomfortable, tried vainly to stem the torrent of her mother's disapproval, and only succeeded in diverting it to herself.

"Here are the men now!" Carol raised her voice,

and silence fell on the room while the women listened to the tramp of footsteps on the veranda. Madge Stevenson, with a final pat of her powder puff, jumped up from the table and ran to meet the weary group which crowded through the door. Hester was the first to enter, her eyes wide and expectant in her white, strained face. "Where are the police?" she demanded.

"They haven't come yet," Helen answered, and then in explanation to Mr. Pennington, "The telephone was out of order, and I had to send one of the boys off with a chit. He came back a few minutes ago to report that the cable in the railway had broken and that no trains were running. So then I told him he'd have to walk."

The older man nodded. "That's the worst of dealing with natives, I suppose. Well, there's no help for it. When do you figure the police can get here now, Townsend?"

John calculated rapidly before he committed himself. "It will be at least three hours, I think; perhaps longer."

"You didn't find the murderer did you, darling? I've been almost frantic," Madge said, pressing close to her husband's side.

"Not a sign of him," Dick said cheerfully. "You shouldn't have worried about me."

The other guests unconsciously turned to the capable figure of the manufacturer, waiting for his next words.

"As long as the police won't be here for several hours," Pennington said slowly, "I suppose it is up to

us to handle things as best we can until they get here—safeguard the women, and see that nothing in the bungalow is disturbed.”

“I must get sonny to bed,” Helen interrupted, looking up at her husband. “The poor child is asleep in his chair.”

“I think all of you women should stay in the hotel to-night,” Pennington said. “The bungalows would probably be safe enough, but we can’t afford to take any chances, and if you are all under one roof, it will be easier to keep track of what is going on.”

“Oh!” Helen exclaimed in dismay. “Poor Miss Hancock! I forgot all about her. She’s been down there alone in the bungalow for hours.”

“Miss who?” asked Pennington.

“Miss Hancock, the boy’s governess,” explained Clarence. “She usually has her meals down there—shy or something, but to-night she had a headache and said she was going to bed without any dinner. There’s no need to worry about her though, Semut is there. He’s my Malay boy, and is devotion itself. Don’t fuss, Helen”—he turned to his wife—“we have enough on our hands.”

“It was awful of me to forget her,” Helen reproached herself. “But she’s so quiet and self-effacing that I never think of her when she’s not around.”

Pennington nodded. “Just the same, I think Mr. Goodrich had better bring her up here to stay with the other women.” He turned to address John Townsend. “Will you speak to the head boy and arrange about

rooms for the women upstairs? The place is more than half empty, I understand, so there shouldn't be any difficulty. You can thrash it out with him better than I could. In the meantime, I'll talk things over with the rest of the men and arrange some kind of a patrol until the police get here. One of us should stay down at the bungalow to make sure that nothing is disturbed there; someone should keep an eye on the servants to see that they don't bolt, and a couple of us should patrol the paths and keep watch for anything suspicious." John nodded his agreement with the programme, and went off to find the head boy while Pennington began talking quietly to the group of men surrounding him.

Hester Page had dropped into the chair nearest the front door, and oblivious apparently to everything that was said or done, was concentrating her suspicious stare on each of the men in turn.

Carol touched her brother's arm. "Bob," she said in an urgent whisper, "I've got to speak to you. There's something you must know before the police get here."

Bob started nervously and then frowned. "Not now, that Goodrich guy has been watching me like a hawk. I'll see you later." Carol flashed an indignant glare at Clarence, who dropped his eyes and began fumbling in his pocket for a cigarette.

Pennington's voice interrupted the little by-play. "I think you will all agree that under the circumstances we men should maintain some sort of watch until the police arrive, to make sure that no one escapes, and that no stranger is prowling around the bungalows or

the hotel." He paused as a murmur of approval came from the expectant group, and the men began volunteering their services.

Deliberately he examined the faces turned toward him before he continued. "We will divide up this way. Townsend, I think, should be the one to guard the bungalow and make sure nothing is disturbed down there. Goodrich can patrol the main path leading from the hotel down to his bungalow, after he has brought the governess up here. Blake can stand watch outside the back entrance of the hotel, so that none of the servants can do a bunk. Stevenson had better take the side entrance and keep an eye on that part of the hotel, while Courtney takes the front, and watches the two doors there, the one opening into the dining-hall, and the smaller one into the hall with the stairs. That leaves only Gerry Townsend and myself. I think Gerry might patrol the path between the first bungalow and the fourth. He can keep in touch then with both Goodrich and his brother in case either needs assistance. Since I am the only stranger in the outfit, and am acting pro tem. for the police, I will circulate generally and keep in touch with all of you. Is that satisfactory?" Several of the men looked discontented with the arrangement, but before anyone voiced his objections, John Townsend returned with the head boy.

"It is all fixed up," he announced. "There are half a dozen rooms vacant on the second floor, and the boys are making up the beds."

Carol turned impulsively to Hester. "You must share my room."

The little dancer eyed her sombrely and shook her head. "No thanks. I'd rather be alone." She clutched her raincoat more tightly around her.

"Oh, come now," Bob put in. "You don't want to be by yourself to-night. You'd better take a bed in Carol's room."

To his astonishment the girl turned on him fiercely. "I'd rather be alone, I said. Can't you understand that I don't trust any of you? Somebody here killed Katherine, and on our way up from the bungalow just now, someone tried to put his hand in my pocket. It was so dark that I couldn't see who it was, but it must have been the murderer—or someone, anyway, who was interested in getting hold of the thing I found at the bungalow."

There was a stunned silence while the men looked blankly at each other, and the women looked incredulously at Hester. Pennington regarded the girl with a puzzled frown. "Are you sure you aren't mistaken, Miss Page?"

She nodded. "There was no mistake. I felt the hand slip into my pocket. It was a large, hairy hand. Fortunately I had the——" she hesitated and substituted 'clue' for the word she had nearly used, "doubled up in my fist. When his hand touched mine, he hurriedly withdrew it, but at the same moment he seemed to stumble against me, and then he pushed me. The path ran close to the cliff just there, and for a

moment I thought I was going over, but I recovered my balance, and just then someone came up, the groups shifted, and—that's all."

"Why didn't you scream?" demanded Dick sceptically. "I was just a little way behind you."

"I was too surprised at first, and then I was so frightened that no sound came when I tried to yell. My lips and throat were too dry." She shuddered at the recollection.

"Haven't you any idea who it was?" asked Pennington scanning the half circle of men.

Hester shook her head. "It was raining hard, and just there the trees cast a dark shadow. I had been walking with my head down so that I could follow the path, and I didn't know who had come up beside me. It might have been any one of you. But," she finished with a defiant lift of her small, pointed chin, "that is why I wish to be alone until the police come. I don't trust anybody."

The volley of protests were interrupted by the appearance of the head boy and his announcement that the rooms were ready for the ladies. Helen crossed to the table and aroused her small son, who was too sleepy to do more than mutter a half-hearted protest at the indignity of being herded off with the women.

Lady Emily turned on her husband. "This whole performance is ridiculous, Henry. Don't think for a minute that Diane and I are going to spend the night here. We are going down to our own bungalow. You may enjoy this low melodrama, but I don't, and I

have no intention of being involved in it." Pennington winced at her tone, and for a moment regarded her hard face and formidable figure with something of his customary awe. Then his heavy jaw squared. "Don't be a fool, Emily," he snapped. "I've no time to argue with you. I'm responsible for your safety, and you are going to do as I say. The boy's waiting to show you to your room. You and Diane are going with him, and you're going now." His wife opened her mouth to voice another protest, and then, apparently overcome by the decisiveness of her husband's words and attitude, shrugged her massive shoulders and, followed by the dimpling Diane, walked with slow dignity from the room.

Carol hung back hoping for a word with her brother, but Madge seized her arm murmuring, "Let me go up with you, won't you? I am terrified of Chinamen!"

Pennington's eyes were troubled as he watched Hester moving slowly toward the door. "For heaven's sake, Miss Page," he said stepping close to her side, "be careful. Stay in your room. Close all the shutters and keep your door locked. Don't open it for anybody until the police come." He lowered his voice so that only its reassuring tones were audible to the group of men facing them. The grimness of her face seemed to relax as she murmured, "All right, I will," and turning, ran up the staircase.

"Well, you all know what you are to do, don't you?" Pennington asked in a businesslike tone on rejoining the men. He glanced at his thin platinum watch, "It's

ten minutes of eleven now. We'd better get to our posts."

Twenty-five minutes later, a darkly shrouded figure slipped cautiously from one of the upstairs rooms, peered nervously into the dimly lighted hall, and then, like a shadow passed noiselessly down the empty staircase.

Outside in the shrubbery, a taut, worried man was walking stealthily backwards and forwards, his mind tortured with doubt, his hands automatically clenching and unclenching themselves, while his anxious eyes were strained through the rainy darkness toward the side door of the hotel. Would it open, or would all his careful plans miscarry? A cold perspiration broke out on his forehead. Those other fools on guard! Would one of them come up now and spoil everything? He stood still, his heart pounding. The door was silently swinging open. The crack, lighted from the dining-hall spread wider and wider, and then a dark shape was outlined for a second before the door closed behind it. The veranda steps creaked. Ah, his luck had held. Quickly he stepped forward, his slouch hat, dripping with rain, concealed the murderous gleam in his eyes.

CHAPTER V

IT was after two o'clock when a group of tired, mud-stained men struggled up the last few feet of the cliff and reached the path that wound around the hill to the hotel. The rain had stopped some time before, and the bright tropic moon sliding down the western sky touched with caressing beams the wet, glistening leaves of trees and bushes, and turned to silver the puddles along the path, and the swollen streams that gushed down the mountainside. For the most part, the men showed evidence of their trek through the jungle. Their clothes were torn, their hands bled from contact with impeding branches and creepers, and their faces were swollen from bites of mosquitoes and insects that infested the dank, swampy woods through which they had fought their way. Only one of their number seemed to have passed through the ordeal without damage, a small, squat Malay, who, being the first to reach level ground, turned to give a brown hand, surprisingly strong, in turn to his chief, Campbell, and to the four men behind him.

"It isn't far now, thank God," the hotel manager panted. "Only about a quarter of a mile, and all straight going."

"Someone is coming around the bend, tuan," the

Malay warned, and a second later, a large figure bulked on the path in front of them.

"Who are you?" barked Campbell.

"I'm Pennington, one of the guests here. I've been trying to take over until you arrived."

The manager stepped forward. "A terrible thing, Mr. Pennington. Nothing like this has ever happened here before. I don't know what to make of it. Is Lady Emily upset?"

"Never mind that," Campbell interposed. "I want to know what has happened. The Chinese boy was so frightened we couldn't make much out of his yarn except that one of the mems had been killed and his brother had been unjustly shut up. By the way, Mr. Pennington, this is Dr. Turner," he nodded to a pudgy figure. "That is my assistant, Ismael"; he pointed out the Malay who was regarding Pennington with dark, unfathomable eyes. "This is Hang Hwa, our Chinese interpreter," he waved a bony hand vaguely toward a plump, gasping Chinaman. "And the other Chinaman is your messenger. Now tell us what happened."

Having briefly acknowledged the introductions, Pennington turned to walk along beside the tall, gangling Scotch official as he recounted the events of the evening. His story was concise and to the point, interrupted by occasional questions from Campbell. "So, I disposed of the men as I have described, and with one exception, they have been at their posts each time I made the rounds. The

exception was Gerry Townsend. He was somewhat the worse for liquor so I gave him what I considered the least important post, that between the bungalows. He was there the first two times I stopped by, but I haven't seen him since. I suppose he is asleep somewhere. To the best of my knowledge, that is all that has happened."

Ismael who had been following the conversation as closely as the narrow trail permitted, turned to the manager behind him. "Tuan Barrows, will tell us please which guests occupied the bungalows?"

"Certainly," the worried manager replied, "The bungalow nearest the hotel is occupied by Mr. and Miss Courtney, a young American brother and sister who came a week ago to-night, last Friday. The second bungalow is rented by Mr. Pennington here, his wife, Lady Emily, and his stepdaughter, Miss Diane. The Goodrich family, consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Goodrich, their little boy, his governess, and Mr. Goodrich's Malay boy, Semut, have the third bungalow. The fourth bungalow, which is the furthest away, is occupied by Miss Lowell and Miss Page. It was there the tragedy occurred."

Ismael nodded his understanding, "And what other guests are there in the hotel?"

"This is between seasons, you know," the manager apologized. "The bridal suite, second floor front was taken two weeks ago by Mr. and Mrs. Stevenson for their honeymoon. On Thursday, we let two of the side rooms up there to the two Mr. Townsends, and

just before I left to go down to Penang, a Mr. Blake took a small room at the rear of the second floor. They are all fine people. I can't believe that any of them is capable of such a terrible crime."

Pennington listened impatiently to the rooming details, and as soon as Ismael seemed satisfied, once more addressed Campbell. "I agree with Mr. Barrows. It is incredible that any of the men I've been associated with this evening could be guilty, and yet, there is Miss Page's story, that the clue she found belonged to a white man, and that some one of us had tried to push her over the cliff in an effort to obtain it. Furthermore, as you will see at the bungalow, the footprints there seem to vindicate the Chinaman. Of course, I'm a stranger to all these people, have hardly exchanged a word with any of them before to-night, but I'm damned if I believe any of those chaps is a murderer."

"Tuan Pennington," Ismael's musical voice broke in, "that clue which Miss Page found—have you any knowledge of what it could be?"

"No," the manufacturer said. "She was standing over by the bureau in the bedroom, and suddenly she dashed over to the bed and snatched up something from the floor. She kept it in her hand, and put her hand in her raincoat pocket. I asked her what it was, and she was rather disagreeable about it, seemed to think no one except herself was interested in solving the crime. Personally, I think she was a

bit hysterical—quite natural, you know, under the circumstances. I was sceptical about her story of being pushed. It seemed a bit thick, with all of us right there with her. However, I told her to lock her door and shutters and not to open them to anyone until you got here.”

“That was wise,” Ismael approved. “Her story is strange.”

“Well, here we are,” Campbell exclaimed as the big building, its lower floor ablaze with lights, its upper story dark and silent, loomed on the right of the path. “Will you round up your guards, Pennington, all except the man at the fourth bungalow, and we will hear whether anything has happened since you’ve been gone. Hang Hwa,” he stopped to wait for the slow-moving Chinaman, “you get busy with the boys and find out what they know. Talk to the prisoner first, and then pick up any information you can about the guests, their relation to each other, and to the murdered woman. You know what I want.” The Chinaman nodded, and spluttered something in his native tongue to the Chinese boy, who promptly led him through the dining hall into the servants’ quarters.

Campbell mounted the steps to the veranda which on three sides surrounded the hotel, and glanced into the big, deserted dining-hall with its orderly array of tables and chairs. “What next, Ismael? Shall we wait and talk to the men, or shall we go right down to the bungalow?”

"I think first, tuan, that we should see Mem Page," the little Malay said thoughtfully. "I am troubled about her."

Campbell hesitated. "Everything seems to be quiet upstairs. I rather expected to find Miss Page waiting for us. If she is asleep, I don't think I'll disturb her until morning. We have a lot to do, and if we have a hysterical woman on our hands, it will hold things up indefinitely."

"If it is all the same to you, Campbell," Dr. Turner interrupted, "I'd like to get my examination over as soon as possible. I've had a hard day, and I have an operation at nine o'clock this morning."

The Scotchman nodded. "All right, we'll go down to the bungalow as soon as Pennington returns. The men can wait here until we are through." Then he added, noticing Ismael's worried expression, "Put a guard outside Miss Page's door, and then we'll be sure she is all right."

Silently the Malay slipped into the hotel, and a moment later the strong, bulky figure of Pennington mounted the front veranda steps, followed by several men whom he introduced to the waiting official. "Mr. Stevenson, Mr. Blake, Mr. Goodrich. Sorry, Campbell, I couldn't locate young Townsend, and Courtney, too, seems to have given me the slip for the time being. He was near the front entrance when I went down to meet you, and when I didn't see him upon our arrival, I thought he might have wandered around the side of the building to have a chat

with Stevenson, but Stevenson says he hasn't seen him for an hour."

"He can't be very far." Campbell didn't seem particularly disturbed. "Did any of you chaps hear or see anything out of the way since you've been on duty?" The men shook their heads. "Not a thing." Goodrich spoke for all of them.

"Well, we are going down to the bungalow, now. If you don't mind waiting a little longer, I'd like to talk to you when we get back. Just make yourselves comfortable." With a nod, the lanky Scotchman went down the steps followed by Dr. Turner. Before they had reached the path, Ismaël joined them. "The hotel manager told the clerk to watch outside Miss Page's door. I tried the handle, and found the door was locked. The shutters also are closed, so she should be safe."

A few minutes later they were mounting the creaking veranda steps of the fourth bungalow. John Townsend had hurried to meet them as their footsteps crunched along the gravel path. "I'm glad you have come. Has my brother showed up yet? Pennington was down here looking for him."

"No," Campbell replied, and then noticing in the light from the open door, the taut expression on the Englishman's face, he added gently, "Don't worry. He'll be all right."

"Do you mind if I take a look for him?" John asked. "He's been drinking quite a bit to-day, and if he's asleep outside he may get a bout of fever. He hasn't been in the East long."

"Go ahead, Mr. Townsend." Campbell's voice was sympathetic. "We will be busy here for a little while, and won't have time to talk to you or the other men until later. You can meet us in the dining-hall when you have found your brother."

Gratefully John hurried away, while Campbell joined Dr. Turner and Ismael, who from the doorway were surveying the chaotic living-room.

"Looks as though she had put up a fight," Dr. Turner remarked.

"No, tuan, I think not, from the appearance of this room," Ismael contradicted. "Rather it seems to me that the murderer has been searching for something. It is a surface disturbance, not the scene of a struggle."

"Let's get on with it," Campbell said, striding across the debris. "According to Pennington, the woman was found in the front room, which belonged to Miss Page." He paused on the threshold of the bedroom and then continued, "I agree with you, Ismael. There's no sign of a struggle here. Everything seems to be in place."

With short, quick steps, the little doctor went to the bedside, threw back the sheet, and bent over the murdered woman. He slipped on a pair of rubber gloves, and with surprising gentleness, his pudgy fingers explored the body while Campbell and Ismael stood patiently waiting the result of his examination. At length he straightened. "We'll have to have an autopsy, but the cause of death is obvious. She was

strangled with this." In his hand he held a narrow black strap. "It looks as if it had come off some luggage. The murderer probably stood behind her, slipped it over her head, like a noose and then pulled the long end taut. She has been dead a number of hours." He looked thoughtfully around the room as he pulled off his gloves. "She was probably standing near the bed—the matting doesn't look scuffed as it would if she had been dragged along it. When she was unconscious, or dead, the murderer probably pulled aside the mosquito netting and threw her body on the bed."

Campbell bent eagerly over the strap. "Not much chance of fingerprints, I suppose," he said, wrapping it carefully in a large handkerchief which he had pulled from a sagging pocket. "But anyway, we can check up on the owner easily enough."

After a single glance at the strap, Ismael had moved away, and was slowly circling the room, each article of furniture receiving long, speculative attention. Having thoroughly examined the bedside table, the two wicker chairs, the wooden chest of drawers and the wardrobe, he squatted down and began a systematic search of the floor, his slim, brown hands sliding over each inch of matting and board. It was not until he had wriggled in and out from under the bed that he spoke. "There is nothing, tuan, save only this slight, fresh tear in the mosquito netting." He pointed to a place where several threads had been ripped in a bottom fold near the head of the bed.

"It was here, I think, that Miss Page located whatever it was she found."

The white officer bent down. "Strange she should have spotted that from across the room, the folds of netting are thickest just here. It must have been something that shone, or glittered—gold or brass perhaps."

"That is what I think too, tuan." The little brown man rose swiftly to his feet. "There is nothing more to see here, tuan. No footprints. Too many people have moved about. Only by the window, where the rain came in, I found the marks of bare feet—the waiter's I think."

"We haven't done so badly, Ismael." Campbell's voice sounded pleased. "We can identify the owner of the strap by checking on the baggage, and when we have talked to Miss Page, we may have even a more direct clue. Let's take a look in the other rooms."

Like a brown shadow, Ismael slipped through the door, followed more slowly by Campbell and the doctor. "Please, tuan, do not come in here just yet," he called from the back room as his superior crossed the living-room and reached the doorway. "There, beside the light switch, on those garments, are muddy footprints of the Chinese boy—bare feet marks again, you see, and to my thinking, proof of his innocence."

"How do you make that out?" Dr. Turner asked. Campbell's grim face relaxed into a smile. "It is

simple. The murderer must have been here first to have scattered these things about, because the boy's footprints are on top of them. If he had been here first and killed her, his feet would have been wiped clean before he pulled things about. Furthermore, the light would have been on, and he wouldn't have trod on them. It looks to me as though the boy told the truth. He came through the rain and the mud with the tray which he left in the other room. This room was in darkness, hence his carelessness in treading on the clothes."

Ismael nodded his approval. "Allah was with him when he left such clear evidence of his guiltlessness."

"You aren't much of a detective, I'm afraid, Doc," Campbell chided. "Even Pennington figured that out." Then to Ismael, he said, "All right. Gather the things up carefully and preserve the footprints as well as you can. I'm going to look through the trunks and things in case the murderer didn't find what he was looking for."

"You won't need me any more to-night, Campbell." Dr. Turner remarked, picking up his sodden hat from the chair on which he had tossed it. "I think I'll go back to the hotel and snatch some sleep. I hope to God the railway is running by eight o'clock. I'd hate to have to scramble down the mountain." With a yawn, the weary little doctor clumped from the room.

For half an hour, the white officer and the Malay searched every nook and corner of the room and its

disorderly contents, sorting and selecting anything that might throw any light on the history of the murdered woman. At the end of that time, Campbell rose stiffly from the floor where he had been kneeling in front of a battered wardrobe trunk. "I'm going to sit in a chair while I go over these letters. You examine those trinkets, Ismael, and see if there are any initials on them, or anything of value."

"I have already done so, tuan. There is nothing, except this." He held up a gold wedding ring which he had disentangled from a mass of cheap, gaudy beads, ear-rings and bracelets. "It says 'G.B. to K.L. '26'."

"That seems to confirm Blake's statement that he married her eight years ago, and that Lowell was her maiden name. The ring doesn't look as though it had been worn very much," Campbell said, handing the ring back to Ismael and taking up a letter from the cluttered handful he had dropped on the table beside him. "By Jove!" he exclaimed a second later. "This is from Goodrich!"

Swiftly he sorted a dozen in the same handwriting and glanced through them, his thin lips set in a cynical line. "Pah, how any man could write such drivel. I think 'Ever thine, Clarence' is going to have a lot of explaining to do, not only to us, but to his wife."

Ismael picked up the solitary letter that remained. "This is from Blake, but it is not affectionate, as a husband's letter should be. Its tone is angry."

"I wonder which of the two killed her," Campbell mused aloud. "We'll have to check up on their alibis. According to the waiter, Miss Page gave the dinner order for her friend at eight o'clock. That means she must have left the Lowell woman here alive say, fifteen minutes before. The waiter got here and found her dead about eight-thirty. She must have been killed sometime between 7.50 and 8.25. We must find out where everyone was during that thirty-five minutes, and that ought to be easy."

Ismael stared at him sombrely. "I don't think it will be as simple as you think, tuan. I mistrust so much apparent good fortune at the beginning of a case."

"Don't be pessimistic," Campbell said good-naturedly, stuffing the letters into the opposite pocket from the one which held the strap, and moving with long strides toward the door. "We've got these letters, the strap, and presently we'll have the clue that the Page girl found. We ought to have a complete case against one of these birds by noon." He pushed open the door and his footsteps clattered on the loose board veranda. "We'll get a statement from the men to-night. I want to hear what Hang Hwa found out from the servants, and get a general line-up on the situation. As soon as it is light, you can scout around and find out whose baggage the strap came from." The officer stepped briskly along the path that was drying in the soft breeze. The moon had long since slipped from the sky, and there was a

freshness in the cool air that forecast the approach of dawn. From the treetops a thousand birds were chorusing a welcome to the new day.

Ismael followed him slowly, his dark eyes peering into the shadows. "I don't like it, tuan," he murmured. "It seems to me that the very spirit of evil is abroad to-night, and I fear he will not be satisfied with only one victim."

Campbell frowned. "You are too well educated to be superstitious, Ismael. Forget that bunk about spirits. What we are after is a cold-blooded murderer."

The little Malay said nothing, but quickened his steps as they came to a dark clump of trees. The little stream that usually trickled down from the top of the hill and under the path before it plunged down the steep, wooded slope into the marshy jungle, had swollen with the rains and seemed to be roaring a protest at its doubled burden as it hurled itself into the gully beside the Goodrich bungalow. The air was damp and cold, heavy with the odour of decaying vegetable matter. Under his neat, white drill suit, Ismael shivered.

CHAPTER VI

As the two police officers entered the dining-hall, they were greeted by a weary-eyed group of men. A quick glance assured Campbell that every one was present: Pennington, calm and self-possessed, was puffing leisurely on an expensive-smelling cigar; Clarence Goodrich was nervously pacing the floor pulling furiously at a cigarette; Dick Stevenson was talking in a low voice to a broad-shouldered, good-looking youngster whom Campbell assumed to be Bob Courtney; Blake, with a half-filled glass of whisky soda, was sitting gloomily at a table apart from the others; while John Townsend seemed to be mounting guard over a bedraggled figure which was sprawled loosely across a couple of chairs.

"I won't keep you long, gentlemen," Campbell's pleasant voice addressed them. "I'll just take a statement from each of you, and then let you get some sleep." He pulled forth a stubby pencil and a battered loose-leaf note-book, and seated himself at the table which Ismael had cleared of its silverware and china.

"Mr. Pennington," he smiled at the manufacturer, "I'll begin with you because we have already had a talk. Give me your full name, residence, and any details about your arrival here."

The middle-aged Englishman nodded his understanding. "My full name is Henry Carey Pennington, and I live with my wife, Lady Emily, and my step-daughter, Diane, at Oak Park Manor, Cobden, in Surrey. As you may know, I'm a manufacturer of arms and ammunition. I had been working pretty hard, and I crocked up along in the spring. First time I ever did such a thing," his voice held a note of apology. "My physician, Sir Isaac Campbell, ordered a sea trip, and Lady Emily decided it would be a good idea for us all to go around the world. We ran into some hot weather in the Philippines, and the heat grew worse as we went on. By the time we reached Penang, my wife was suffering so intensely that when we heard of this hotel in the hills, we decided to stop over a boat, hoping that the change of climate would pick her up. We arrived here on Wednesday and were assigned to the second bungalow. We have kept very much to ourselves, and had little more than a nodding acquaintance with the other guests until to-night."

"Who was here when you arrived?" Campbell asked, glancing up from the rapid notes he had been taking.

Pennington stared thoughtfully at the group around him. "Mr. Courtney and his sister had the first bungalow, and Mr. Goodrich and his family, the one on the other side of us. Miss Lowell and Miss Page had the fourth bungalow. Mr. and Mrs. Stevenson were quartered here in the hotel. That was all. The two Mr. Townsends came yesterday, and Mr. Blake

arrived to-day—or rather, I should say yesterday, in view of the hour.”

“Where were you last evening, Mr. Pennington, say from quarter to eight until half past?”

“I was in my bungalow until a little after eight, and then I came up here to have dinner.”

“Of course you understand that it is merely a formality,” the officer continued, “but have you any witnesses who can vouch for your time?”

From his unobtrusive position behind Campbell, Ismael was busy noting every movement on the part of the guests; each flicker of an eyelid, each tremor of lips or hands. Pennington was imperturbable, his voice, eyes and hands steady.

“My wife and daughter were in the bungalow with me most of the time,” the manufacturer said easily. “But they went up to dinner a few minutes before I did. My wife is rather impatient, and she didn’t want to wait until I finished the letter I was writing. I wanted it to go off in the morning mail, and I didn’t want to make a second trip up to the hotel through the rain, so I was perhaps fifteen or twenty minutes late in coming to dinner. The letter must still be in the pouch, if you want to confirm my statement.” His voice was slightly derisive.

“Can you throw any light at all on this murder, Mr. Pennington?”

“None. I still feel it must have been committed by one of the servants, or perhaps some outsider who thought the bungalow was empty until Miss Lowell

surprised him. That would account for her being in Miss Page's room."

"It is possible," Campbell admitted, "and we are looking into it. I won't keep you any longer now, Mr. Pennington. You'd better get some sleep."

As the manufacturer bowed himself from the room, the officer turned to Clarence Goodrich. "Just give me the same sort of outline that Mr. Pennington did, please."

Clarence looked at him sulkily. "I don't know anything about the murder. Why don't you round up the servants instead of badgering us?"

Campbell's eyes hardened. "What is your full name and occupation? When did you arrive here? What do you know about the murdered woman?"

Goodrich blinked at the change of tone, started an angry reply and then thought better of it. "My name is Clarence Goodrich. I am a rubber planter in Singapore. I came here two weeks ago with my wife, my son, his governess and my boy, Semut, for a month's holiday." His short laugh was bitter.

"Were any of these people here when you came?"

"Only the Stevensons. There were other guests, but they all cleared out a week ago."

"Before Miss Lowell and Miss Page arrived?"

"Yes. The last of them went on Thursday, and Miss Lowell didn't get here until the next day."

Campbell leaned across the table. "Where did you meet Miss Lowell, and how well did you know her?"

All of the planter's bluster dropped from him, and he lit another cigarette before replying. "I knew Miss Lowell in Singapore," and then he added defensively, "I had no idea she was coming to Penang."

"How well did you know her?"

"Fairly well. Singapore is very cosmopolitan—you meet everyone there sooner or later."

"Don't fence, answer my question." Campbell's voice was impatient.

"I knew her very well, but that has nothing to do with the murder."

"Well enough to write her a lot of letters?"

Clarence puffed on his cigarette, obviously stalling for time. "I did write her, I believe," he admitted at last.

"You believe?" Campbell raised his sandy eyebrows. His hand half reached toward his pocket, and then dropped away. The planter watched him apprehensively. That involuntary gesture told him much. He squared his shoulders. "You know how it is," he began in a confidential tone, "I met the girl, and she was attractive. One thing led to another——" He moistened his red lips. No response from the dour-looking Scotchman. He hesitated.

"When you got tired of her, you came up here with your family, and she followed you," Campbell finished for him.

Ismael's inscrutable gaze was fixed on John Townsend's suddenly clenched fists.

"She came up here because her show went on the

rocks in Singapore," Clarence said sullenly. "It happened after I'd left. I didn't know anything about it. I'd broken with her before that."

"This is an expensive hotel," Campbell said. "How could she afford to stay here, if she was out of work?"

"I helped her out a little, now and then. I suppose you know that too." The planter's voice sounded desperate, and his eyes shifted longingly toward the door.

To his relief, the officer abandoned that line of inquiry. "Where were you from seven-forty-five until eight-thirty last night?"

Clarence's face brightened. "In the bungalow with my wife and son until we came up here for dinner."

"They were with you all the time?"

"Well, not exactly. I got interested in a book I was reading, and forgot to shave and dress until after half past seven. The boy was impatient and hungry, and though he was told to wait for us on the porch, my wife discovered he had disappeared, so she went on up to the hotel to look for him. I followed her as soon as I could dress."

"You were alone in the bungalow then for quite a few minutes?" Campbell questioned.

"Hardly," Goodrich's smile was malicious. "Miss Hancock, the governess was there, and so was Semut."

If Campbell felt any disappointment at the alibi, his voice did not betray it as he said, "That will be all for the present, Mr. Goodrich." With eager steps the planter hurried toward the door.

"Mr. Stevenson." The officer turned to Dick.

"I am Richard Stevenson, a broker in Singapore," Dick Stevenson stepped forward. "I came up here three weeks ago—on my honeymoon."

"Do you know any of these people?"

"All those who live in Singapore," Dick said promptly, "Mr. and Mrs. Goodrich, and John and Gerry Townsend. I had also met Miss Lowell and Miss Page."

"How well did you know Miss Lowell?"

"Just casually. Before my wife came out from England to marry me, I was on a party or two with Miss Lowell." He hesitated, "I hope that doesn't have to be made public. There was nothing in it, but my wife is very unsophisticated, and she might misunderstand. She doesn't know that I had met Miss Lowell."

"Wasn't it obvious when you saw Miss Lowell here that you had known her previously?"

The broker flushed. "It sounds caddish, I know, but Miss Lowell seemed to grasp the situation when I didn't speak to her the morning she arrived. She was a good scout and acted as though she had never seen me before."

"Rather an elaborate subterfuge, wasn't it, if your acquaintance was so harmless?"

"It was all rather silly," Dick admitted. "But my wife has always been jealous, and she was inclined to harp on the wild life that the bachelors live in the East. It seemed wiser not to raise any doubts in her mind."

"Where were you last night between seven-forty-five and eight-thirty?" the officer asked, taking pity on Dick's embarrassment.

Stevenson smiled. "I'm clear there at any rate. My wife and I dressed early, and came downstairs for a little drink before eating. She doesn't drink herself, but she doesn't mind my having a pahit before makan. We were together until I went down later with the other men to the bungalow."

The officer nodded his satisfaction and dismissed him before turning to Bob Courtney. The youngster took a position in front of the table. "My name is Robert Courtney, commonly known as 'Bob.' My sister, Carol and I are travelling around the world, not a Cook's tour, or anything as bromidic as that—we just go to interesting places and stay until we get fed up."

"You have no business?"

"Not yet. This trip is a sort of 'strange interlude' between college and a career. I'm to go into business with my father's partner when I get back to America. This is my last fling, so to speak."

"When did you come to Penang?"

"We were down at the E. & O. in Penang for a week, and then having done the "Snake Temple," the Chinese Temples, the Mosques and so on, we came up here for a breathing space last Friday. We are going up to Angkor next week."

"Do you know any of the people here?"

Bob's smile was spontaneous. "I know them all now. Next to Charlie Lindbergh, I'm the best

little emissary of good will that ever came out of America."

"Did you know Miss Lowell?" Campbell persisted, impervious to the youngster's charm.

Bob looked uncomfortable. "Yes. I had met both Miss Lowell and Miss Page before."

"Where was that?"

"They were in Honolulu when we were there. Miss Page had been sick, and when the show they were with had to leave for their next engagement, Miss Lowell threw up her job and stayed to nurse her. They were both stony broke, but Katherine was a darn good sport, and I played around with her a bit, until Kay, my sister, thought I was getting in too deep, and we beat it." His voice was light, but his eyes, Ismael noticed, no longer met his interrogator's.

"Did you see her again?"

"No, not until we ran into her up here, and then Kay saw to it that I didn't see much of her."

"Where were you last evening between seven-forty-five and eight-thirty?"

"I came up from the bungalow around half past seven, hoping I might have a game of billiards with somebody, but there was no one around, so I went into the bar and had a couple of drinks. Then I went out on the veranda to watch the storm and wait for Kay."

"How long were you on the veranda?"

"I don't know, twenty minutes, or perhaps half an hour."

"Did you see anyone while you were there?"

Bob looked thoughtful. "I saw Miss Page come in. The Goodrich kid came next, and Mrs. Goodrich, and then Lady Emily and her daughter. I was sitting in one of the chairs at the far end of the front veranda, and I don't believe any of them saw me. Kay came along pretty soon, and we went in to dinner together about half past eight."

Campbell leaned forward. "Where were you last night when we got here?"

Bob smiled. "I ran out of cigarettes and went to get some. There was nothing stirring at the bar of course, so I went up and got some from Kay. I didn't expect you so soon, or I'd have waited," he added ingenuously.

"All right, that will do thank you." Campbell glanced across at Blake who rose slowly from his chair, drained the last drops from his glass and approached the officer with dragging feet.

"Your particulars, please," the officer said in a businesslike tone.

"George Blake, Australian, traveller for Bates and Longworth."

"When did you marry Miss Lowell?"

"Back in June, 1926. She was playing in a stock company in Sydney."

"When did you separate from her?"

"I didn't leave her, if that's what you mean. She just got tired of keeping house, and went back on the stage when I was off on a trip one time."

"When was that?"

"After we'd been married about six months."

"Was that the last you saw of her?"

"No, I tried to talk her into coming back to me, but she wouldn't have any of it. There wasn't any fight, you understand. I wanted a nice little home of my own, and a real wife, and kiddies, and she wasn't cut out for married life. We were friendly enough, and whenever I landed in a city where she was playing, I always looked her up, and we'd have a jolly time together. Then my territory was enlarged to take in India, and I didn't get back to Australia so often. Neither of us were much of a hand at letter writing, so I lost track of her."

"When did you get in touch with her again?"

"Along in the spring of this year, a letter was forwarded to me from her, saying she was in Honolulu and on her uppers. I didn't get the letter for a couple of months, and the cheque I sent off to her was returned marked 'address unknown.' I landed in Singapore a week ago, and heard that she had been there, and was up here in Penang. I wrote to her, and when she didn't answer, I decided to hop off here on my way to Rangoon, and look her up."

"What was in the letter that was so important?"

Blake's heavy face flushed. "I didn't like the things I'd heard about her goings-on in Singapore, and I told her I thought we'd better get a divorce."

"Why were you anxious for a divorce after all this time? Did you want to marry again?"

"A man likes a home of his own," Blake said evasively. "Some place he can come back to."

"Did you have anyone definite in mind?"

"That's neither here nor there." The salesman's voice was gruff. "I certainly didn't kill Katherine, if that's what you are driving at. I wouldn't have touched a hair of her head! Anyway, I was up in my room from the time I got here until I went to dinner."

"You didn't see Miss Lowell, after coming all this distance?"

"No, I wanted to size up the situation first, and figure the best way to approach her. I intended at first to go right down and see her as soon as I got here, but when I signed the register, I noticed that Clarence Goodrich was here too—the one the gossip was about, so I decided to wait and see how they acted."

"Can anyone vouch for your being in your room?"

"Perhaps the bar boy can. I ordered several drinks, and a skinny little Chinaman brought them up each time."

"We can get the record from the bar. That will be all for now, Mr. Blake."

The salesman wiped his brow with a gaudy handkerchief as he turned to leave the room.

"I see you found your brother, Mr. Townsend," Campbell said pleasantly. "Where was he?"

John's lips tightened, but his eyes met the officer's steadily. "I found him on the Goodrich veranda—asleep in one of their long chairs. I brought him along here, but I am afraid he won't be able to answer any questions."

"That's all right. He can wait until morning. Just give me the facts about yourself."

John seemed to stiffen. "I am John Townsend, an exporter in Singapore. My father has an importing business in London, and I've been in charge of the office out here for the last twelve years. Four months ago, my father sent Gerry out to me. He had been mixing around with a rather wild outfit in London, and we hoped that if he got away from them he'd straighten out. He's a fine lad when he isn't drinking. Unfortunately, our strategy wasn't very successful. The East is no place for a weakling, and Gerry continued to go off on a binge about every two weeks. I thought perhaps if I could get him away from people and liquor long enough, I could make him pull himself together, so three weeks ago I took him on a hunting trip with me into Siam. It seemed to do him a world of good, and he swore then that he would never take another drink. We arrived in Penang Thursday, and came up here for the week-end, expecting to catch Monday's boat back to Singapore. He was all right the first day, but yesterday noon I noticed that he had had a drink, and after tiffin he gave me the slip altogether. I didn't see him again until makan last evening."

"Where were you last evening?"

"I spent most of my time trying to locate Gerry," John said simply. "I was all over the place. I came in to dinner late, and he appeared shortly afterward. He must have gone and dressed while I was out looking for him."

"When your brother is intoxicated does he become belligerent?"

"Not to my knowledge. He is very objectionable, and inclined to be quarrelsome." John hesitated, suddenly sensing the trend of the questions. "Good God! you don't suspect Gerry of having committed the murder do you? He didn't even know the woman!"

"We have to consider every possibility, Mr. Townsend." Campbell was noncommittal.

"But that isn't a possibility!" John protested hotly. "Gerry is just a youngster—a bit weak, I'll grant you, but he's not a criminal. It's unthinkable!"

"I'll talk to him later in the day. Even if he was the worse for liquor, he must have been seen by numerous people, and he probably has an airtight alibi. Don't worry. Go and get some sleep."

Still obviously shaken by the interview, John stooped over his brother, and with difficulty roused him. Babbling incoherent protests, Gerry was half led, half carried from the room.

Campbell completed his notes, and turned to his assistant. "Well, that's that, Ismael. What do you think of the outfit?"

The little Malay's face was inscrutable. "It is too soon to think, tuan. Of all whom you interviewed, Tuan Stevenson alone has an alibi. Tuan Pennington was writing letters. I will look in the mail bag to confirm that. Tuan Courtney says he was on the hotel veranda. Perhaps one of the boys saw him, perhaps not. Tuan Blake was in his room. It will be well for

him if the bar boy confirms that. Tuan Goodrich was dressing. From Semut and from Mem Hancock we can find out if that is so. Tuan Goodrich was looking for his brother, and his brother was playing hide and seek, is that not the game? with him."

Campbell grunted. "Worse than that, most of them, if they didn't lie to me outright, were holding out on me. Give them enough rope, and they'll truss themselves. I'm going to find Hang Hwa and see what information he has picked up." The officer rose and stretched himself wearily. "When I talk to those birds to-morrow, it will be quite a different session." Campbell's face was grim, as he disappeared through the swinging door that led to the servants' quarters.

Ismael threw open a shutter and stared at the hot, orange sun, just emerging from the red and violet clouds that banked the Eastern horizon, touching into points of gold the tiny islands that studded the pink sea. All was so serene and beautiful outside. It seemed strange to Ismael that his heart was a leaden lump.

A moment later he was startled by the slamming of the front door. A small, terrified figure bounded into the room, stared wildly around and as it saw Ismael advancing, hurled itself like a bolt at the stalwart little Malay.

"Quick, come quick," Mike gasped, his freckles standing out in splotches on his small white face. "Down in the gully—there's a dead woman!"

CHAPTER VII

THERE was no mistaking the horror in the pale, stricken eyes of the little boy, nor the terror in the grubby hand that tugged at Ismael's arm.

At the sound of the excited, childish voice, Campbell threw open the kitchen door, "What's all the row about?"

"A woman! I found her down in the gully. Her head is all bashed in." Mike hid his face in Ismael's sleeve as though to shut out the recollection.

"Who are you? What were you doing down there?" Campbell asked, staring down in bewilderment at the youngster. The little boy straightened his shoulders and faced the officer, his eager words tumbling out in an almost incoherent stream.

"I'm Mike Goodrich. At least my real name is Clarence, but I call myself Mike. I had something important to tell you about last night, but they wouldn't let me stay up and wait for you, so I got up early this morning."

With an effort Campbell controlled his impatience. If the boy didn't tell his story in his own way, they'd probably never get all the facts. Mike went on. "It was easy to get downstairs, because my governness is awfully sick and mother was taking care of her all night, and I was in mother's room. See? The ole

chink outside in the hall, wouldn't let me come in here, so I thought while I was waiting for one of you policemen to come out, I'd go down to the bungalow and take a look-see. I'd never seen anyone dead, and I wanted to write my pal about it—I'll bet he never saw a real corpse either." The boy's face brightened momentarily, and then catching an impatient gleam in Campbell's sharp grey eyes, he went on hurriedly, "I didn't want anyone to see me, because I was afraid they'd send me back to my room, particularly my guv'nor. So I crept along Indian style, behind bushes and trees down below the path. I was going to circle around behind the bungalows, and come up on the other side of the one where Miss Lowell got killed. It was fun, 'till I got beyond our place, and then I saw something lying on the ground—old clothes, it looked like, and I thought that was funny, because they hadn't been there yesterday when I was sailing boats in the stream. When I got close to it, I saw it was a woman, all bloody."

"Who was it, do you know?" Campbell interrupted.

The boy nodded, his voice an awed whisper. "The little one, you know. Miss Page, the one who lived with Miss Lowell. My! I'm glad we didn't take that bungalow!"

For a moment the officer seemed to stagger under the blow. Recovering himself after a second, he said, "Are you sure, Mike, that it wasn't Miss Lowell? That you didn't go on to the bungalow and then just make up this story to tell us?"

"I don't lie," Mike said with dignity, "and that would have been a lie. It was just as I said. Miss Page is dead, too. I never even went to the bungalow. As soon as I saw her, I came right back to tell the police."

While Campbell was trying patiently to ask details about Mike's story, Ismael slipped from the room. They could hear his feet padding up the stairs, and then the sound of his eager words as he roused the Chinese clerk and addressed him in Malay. A door-knob turned noisily. Ismael knocked, and they heard his urgent, "Miss Page, Miss Page!" A moment later the dazed clerk hurried downstairs and into his office for the pass-key.

"What you wasting time for?" Mike asked, "She's not there. She's dead, I tell you."

In spite of his remonstrance, he followed Campbell and clerk upstairs to the bedroom which had been assigned to the dancer. With shaking hands the Chinaman unlocked the door, and the men pushed into the room. Its emptiness seemed to mock them.

"She didn't even go to bed," Campbell exclaimed, glancing at the unwrinkled spread of pillows and sheets behind the tucked-in klambu.¹ "Why in God's name did she go out last night!" His exclamation was a moan rather than a question.

"If we knew that, tuan, we'd probably know the murderer," Ismael answered drily, turning from his fruitless search of bureau and closet. "She may have wanted something down at the bungalow. Her night

¹Mosquito Netting.

clothes, perhaps. Women, white women are sometimes queer in that respect, I understand. And on her way have met the murderer. Or she may have trusted him, and have met him deliberately. Or perhaps, she may have tried to blackmail him with the evidence she discovered earlier in the evening. Who knows?"

"Well, there's nothing to be seen here. We'll get Doc up and go down to the gully. Come on, son, show us where the body is."

"We don't have to go the way I did this morning," Mike announced a few minutes later as the sleepy-eyed little doctor joined them on the veranda. "We can go along the path. I'll know the place where she is because of the stream." He turned to Campbell and added casually, "What I wanted to see you about this morning was to tell you that I saw the murderer last night."

"What!" Campbell exclaimed as though unwilling to believe his ears.

Mike seemed to swell with importance as he repeated the story he had told Carol. "I didn't see his face," he concluded, "but his hand was white."

"That confirms what Hang-Hwa was telling me," Campbell said in an undertone to his assistant. "The waiter insists that he passed the murderer coming from the bungalow when he went down with the tray. The Chinaman didn't see his face either—just someone bundled up so he couldn't tell whether it was a man or a woman. He was sure it wasn't a native though—

something about the height and the walk, even in the storm. If the kid's story is straight, and he seems like a bright little chap, it means that the murderer got to the bungalow about five or ten minutes past eight, and left about twenty-five minutes past."

"Here's the place," Mike announced, leaving the path and scrambling down the steep slope beside the noisy stream. "See, there she is. In that thicket!" A muddy, crumpled figure sprawled grotesquely against a green background of matted underbrush. Campbell and Dr. Turner stumbled down the incline toward the body while Ismael stood on the path for a moment surveying the scene. It was just here that he had had that queer premonitory fear last night, he remembered, and then practically he began to visualize an earlier event. The unsuspecting girl standing on this same spot, a vague, dark figure beside or behind her, the brutal blow, and then her body hurtling down the slope, and crashing against the impenetrable thicket.

"Yes, the back of her head is cracked in," Dr. Turner was saying as he gently turned the figure and examined the wound.

"What was it done with?" Campbell asked.

"Something heavy—a bludgeon, a blackjack, or more likely, just a big stone."

Campbell dropped to his knees on the black, sappy ground and reached his long, bony hands in turn into each pocket of the shabby raincoat. Ismael leaned forward eagerly as his officer squatted back on his heels to examine the spoils: a crumpled handkerchief,

a cheap metal vanity case, and a lipstick. "I'm afraid that's the whole story," Campbell looked up into his assistant's brown face. "Whatever clue she had is gone. That was doubtless why she was killed." The Malay nodded. "It was to be expected, or why should she be here."

"It's a damn shame," Dr. Turner grunted, struggling to his feet. "The first murder was bad enough, but this one gets under my skin. The other woman was probably no better than she should be, but damn it all, this one looks like a nice girl." He turned the body on its back, straightened out the slim arms and legs, and soberly drew the raincoat over the small, pointed face, with its halo of fine, pale hair.

"One thing at least we can be grateful for, tuan," Ismael said softly. "She was killed before ever we arrived. Her garments are wet through, and it had stopped raining just after we left Penang."

"We ought to have found out, though, that she wasn't in her room, and started a search for her hours ago." Campbell reproached himself.

"I doubt if we could have found her in these dark woods," Ismael said, glancing up at the towered trees and the walls of matted creepers and shrubs. "And in the time we would have spent prowling about in the darkness we have discovered several things which will bring her murderer to justice,—that is all we can do for her now."

Campbell's face was set in grim lines as he rose, "Yes, we know positively that it was a white man.

Do you suppose that it was this girl he was after all the time; that the other woman was killed by mistake? Remember, Miss Lowell was found in Miss Page's bedroom, not in her own!"

"It might be so." Ismael's tone was thoughtful. "But I think rather that this poor mem's death came from her discovery of the murderer's identity. This second murder should make it easier to discover who he is."

"I don't see that," Turner objected. "In my opinion, it makes it just twice as hard."

"No, it will narrow down the search. Several of the men had a motive to kill Miss Lowell, and also the opportunity. We are fairly sure that the motive for this murder was fear. Unless we are very much out of luck, some of our suspects for the first murder will have an alibi for the time when this one was committed," Campbell explained.

Ismael nodded his agreement. "Things that seemed harmless and unimportant in their stories this morning, will need much explaining now. Where was young Tuan Courtney when we reached the hotel, and why did Tuan Gerry Townsend select the veranda of Tuan Goodrich upon which to sleep away his liquor? We must also find out from Tuan Pennington just where his guards were each time he checked up on them."

The impromptu conference was interrupted by a shout from Mike, who, keeping a careful distance from the body, had been scouting through the thick under-

brush, and up the steep, rocky embankment. "Look what I found," he gasped stumbling toward the men. With a triumphant expression he held out a limp leather purse. "I was looking for the thing she got killed with, and I found this." His eyes sparkled as the officer opened the catch and dumped the contents into his broad palm: a few pieces of silver, and a room key.

"Good work, youngster," Campbell commended, and then turned to Ismael. "This is probably Miss Page's purse, but we'll know when we try the key in her door. Unfortunately, there's no hope of fingerprints—the leather is soaking wet."

"Di mana dapat?" Ismael inquired of Mike.

"Come on, I'll show you." The little boy was prancing with excitement as he dashed up the slope ahead of the men, and paused a few feet the other side of the stream, half way up the incline. "Right there it was. It had caught against that stone, the smooth one." He pointed with a grubby hand.

Ismael and Campbell exchanged glances. "That would be right——" With surprising agility the little Malay reached the main path and, keeping a speculative eye on the scene below him, paced off a dozen feet or so. "This must be the place where she was killed, tuan. Only from here could her body have missed those trees, and landed where it did. Unfortunately the path has been trampled by many feet, so the footprints cannot tell us the story. After he killed her, the murderer must have searched her pockets

before he tossed her away, as he did the purse. She was very small and light." A brooding expression settled on his flat, brown face. "It seemed to me as I passed here last night that I could feel the presence of evil still lingering."

"Let's take a look around for the weapon, Ismael. He may have thrown that away too," Campbell said, beginning painstakingly to search the incline and the thickets of tangled creepers and barbed shrubs. In spite of the assistance rendered by Ismael, and by Mike, whose small body could wriggle in and out of places inaccessible to the men, they discovered nothing of importance.

"It was probably a big stone," Campbell said at last. "Lord knows there are plenty around, all so washed by the rain that we'll never know which it was. We might as well go back to the hotel." He straightened his bent back. "We can send a litter down for the body. I'll finish talking to Hang Hwa, and then I'll have him question the servants again about the guests who were here previously. We'll check up on them from the Penang office and find out whether any of them had any connection with these women. If there were any strangers around here yesterday, some of the servants would be bound to have seen them. While I'm talking to Hang Hwa, you can locate the baggage from which that strap was taken."

Impatient to spread the news and proclaim the important part he had played in the tragedy, Mike darted ahead.

"Wait a minute there, young one." Campbell's voice halted him in his tracks. "Not a word about this to anyone, understand?"

The little figure drooped with disappointment.

"You will be helping us to capture the doer of all this evil, if you use your eyes and not your lips," Ismael added.

"You mean, I can help you!" Mike exclaimed, his homely little face suddenly illuminated.

Campbell's grimness softened, and his voice was gentle as he said, "You have already helped us, son. A clever little boy has a chance to see and hear things that a grown-up misses. Just keep your mouth shut and report anything suspicious to Ismael or me, but remember, not a word to anyone else."

Mike quivered with excitement like a puppy. "Gosh!" he breathed, "Oh Gosh! This is better than being a cowboy." As though struck with a sudden inspiration, he wheeled, clicked his heels together and solemnly saluted.

Gravely Campbell returned the salute, but as Mike dropped into place behind him, the officer's gaunt face creased into a grin which was answered by the white flash of Ismael's teeth. Unconscious of their amusement, Mike was busily engaged in adapting his short legs to the long steps of the policemen. With a careful gesture, he pushed his small sun-helmet back on his head, stuck his grimy fists in his abbreviated pockets, swaggered along in a perfect imitation of his newly-crowned idol.

Unfortunately the effectiveness of his entrance into the hotel was marred by the appearance of his mother on the veranda steps, and her reproachful, "Oh, Clarence, where have you been? You shouldn't have gone off without permission."

"Mother, I've asked you not to call me Clarence," her son protested. "Clarence is a terrible name for a detective!" Then catching Ismael's glance of warning, he added hurriedly, "Or a cowboy, or an engineer, or anything, except just an ole rubber planter."

Heedless of his complaint, now that her maternal anxiety was assuaged, Helen turned to Dr. Turner who was slowly plodding up the path. "The Chinese boy told me you were here, Doctor. I wonder whether you'd mind coming up and looking at Miss Hancock."

"What's the matter with her?" growled the weary doctor.

"Fever. Malaria, I suppose," Helen said. "But it is a very bad attack. My husband found her unconscious on the floor when he went down to get her last night. I think she had fallen, for there is a large bump on the back of her head. I gave her twenty-five grains of quinine, and her fever has broken, but she is delirious."

"Is she subject to malaria?" the doctor asked as he followed Helen into the hotel.

"I think so, but this is the first attack she has had since she came to us. Clarence's governesses never last very long unfortunately. He is so high spirited. The last one left just as we were planning to come

up here. I advertised in the *Straits Times*, and Miss Hancock applied for the situation. She seems like a nice girl, very self-effacing. She never talks about herself, so except for the information contained in her references I really know nothing about her."

"All right. I'll take a look at her. Then I've got to get down to the hospital somehow. It's seven-thirty now."

Mike suddenly squirmed out of his mother's grasp and rushed up to Campbell. "I know something about Miss Hancock," he whispered. "Mother didn't know it, but she was friends with Miss Lowell."

"Clarence!" Helen called from the stairway. "Come up here right away and get washed for breakfast."

Mike grimaced. "All right, all right," he answered, and then hurriedly he added to Campbell, "Miss Hancock wasn't sick last night either—at least not very, because I saw her climb out of her window while I was on the veranda—before I got tired of waiting for mother and dad. She went off through the woods."

As Mike reluctantly clumped up the stairs, Campbell turned to his assistant. "That's another angle to work on. Do you suppose the governess could have run into the murderer, and been attacked? Are we dealing with a homicidal maniac after all? If we are, how are we going to prevent other murders?"

CHAPTER VIII .

UPSTAIRS in a big, mosquito-netted bed, Carol Courtney moved restlessly away from the shaft of sunlight that was warming into pink the clear golden pallor of her skin, and mischievously adding a few infinitesimal freckles to those already gleaming on her small, straight nose. Unable to escape the hot band, she slowly opened her hazel eyes and gazed blankly at the strange objects around her. Only her limp green chiffon dress, tossed in a foaming heap on the chair beside her, and the green evening sandals on the floor near the bed, were familiar.

So it was true! the horror of the previous night. Not just a nightmare that would fade, like her other restless dreams, with the warmth of the reassuring sunlight. The police must be downstairs, or perhaps at the bungalow where that other girl was lying dead. She shivered at the swift picture her imaginative conjured, and for the hundredth time wondered who among the guests could be the murderer. Perhaps the police already knew. Perhaps she herself wouldn't be interviewed, and faced with the necessity of telling what she knew. She was so used to exerting all her ingenuity to get Bob out of scrapes that it was second nature to put him first, protect him at any cost to herself. Never before, though, had the moral aspects

of her attitude confronted her, but then, he had never before been involved in a murder. "The darned idiot!" she muttered. "There's nothing to do now but to see him through, or help him face the music."

Carol pushed back the mosquito netting and stepped on to the cool grass rug, glancing distastefully at the evening dress she would have to wear. It seemed somehow ominous. If only she knew some Malay, she could send one of the boys down to her bungalow for a suitable outfit. For a moment she toyed with the idea of appealing to Helen Goodrich to interpret her orders, but she couldn't overcome her latent antagonism to Mrs. Goodrich, and her reluctance to be under obligation to her. As she slipped the green gown over her head, she wondered at her attitude. Mrs. Goodrich had been friendly enough last night. A slow flush spread over her face as she suddenly realized that her resentment was really on behalf of John Townsend, and the casual way in which Helen accepted his devotion.

"If he wants to make a fool of himself, it's nothing to me," she assured herself, viciously smoothing back the ruffled waves of her tawny hair. "It's just that I hate to see a man like that acting like a doormat." Her eyes softened as she thought of his strong bronzed face. "I suppose it is his limp that gets me. The old maternal instinct running riot all over the place. If I once get Bob safely settled I'll probably run a farm for sick cats, homeless dogs, and disabled soldiers, Her mouth widened into a grin, and she smiled

mockingly at the reflection in her mirror before she turned to hurry down the stairs.

Carol had hoped that she would find Bob waiting for her. She hated the idea of going into the cold, dark bungalow alone, but the hall and dining-room were deserted except for the Chinese waiters rattling trays of china and silver as they moved back and forth from the kitchen. Through the constantly opening door came a tantalizing odour of fresh coffee and sizzling bacon. The thought of breakfast hastened her steps. People would be coming downstairs any moment now, and she must change her clothes. Flinging open the veranda door, she found herself in the arms of a man who had started to enter the hall.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," Carol gasped, pulling herself away, and then as she recognized John Townsend, for the second time that morning a crimson wave crept over her clear, young face.

"My fault entirely," John smiled down at her, "I must have been sleep-walking or I would have seen you coming." His face was haggard, and his eyes looked as though he hadn't slept.

Carol spoke impulsively, "Mr. Townsend, I wonder whether you'd mind awfully going down to our bungalow with me. I hate the thought of going in there alone—the shutters closed, you know, and everything so grey and cold." Irrelevantly he noticed that the iris of her hazel eyes had a dark rim that just matched the long, curling lashes.

"Not at all." His voice was formal.

"I can't bear the idea of starting a new day in this dress," she explained with a slight shiver, glancing down disparagingly at her long frivolous skirt.

"What's the matter with it?" John asked. "It looks very nice to me. Seems to suit you, somehow." He was startled to find himself thinking of romantic things like nymphs and dryads—she was so young and fresh, and she moved so delightfully, as though her green slippers floated above the path.

"It happens to be an evening dress, sir, and at this hour in the morning it is only appropriate in Child's or in a hot dog wagon."

"Hot dog wagon! Child's!" he repeated in a bewildered voice.

Mischievously she misunderstood him. "Yes, after a round of parties or night clubs—a cup of coffee and a hamburger, or hot cakes. Umm! boy! what I wouldn't give for one right now."

"Oh, New York!" John exclaimed.

"Exactly, New York. Most of the time I hate it, but it has its points. Broadway at night. Park Avenue in the early morning. Fifth Avenue at sunset."

"And night clubs, and dog wagons," he supplemented. "I suppose you are homesick."

She was suddenly serious. "No, not homesick. One has to have a home before one can be homesick. and I've never had that. Or at least, not since mother and dad died."

"No home?" he exclaimed, feeling a pang as he thought of the grey stone house surrounded by ancient trees and green English meadows where his people had lived for generations. "But where do you live? What do you do?"

"I haven't anyone except Bob, and I take him with me, or sometimes he takes me. Daddy and mother died in an automobile accident when I was twelve and Bob was eight. We were sent to school. We hadn't any relatives, just a guardian, a 'perennial bachelor' who was overwhelmed at having a couple of orphans wished on him."

"But after school," John persisted, interested in an existence so different from anything he had known.

"I graduated from college first, of course," Carol replied in a matter-of-fact tone, "and so I took a little apartment in Boston where I'd be near Bob until he managed to wangle a degree from the reluctant authorities. Vacations we'd travel." Her voice became wistful. "I've always wanted a real home, one with a wide veranda, and open fire-places, where I could have a dog, and a garden; a big, rambling house with stairs to go up to bed, and an old-fashioned garden with pink snapdragons and madonna lilies and delphinium against a grey stone wall." Her face brightened as she added, "When we go back to America, I'm going to have it all, too. Bob promised me that he'd commute to New York so that I wouldn't have to live in a city any more."

A strange child, John thought. Not at all what he'd expect of an American, and yet, she had seemed to embody all his ideas of American girls when he had first noticed her, sleek, well-groomed, amusing—carefree.

"Here we are," she announced, turning from the main path to the little trail that twisted down to the vine-covered veranda of the bungalow. She paused to stare appreciatively at a clump of hibiscus flowers, and her fingers caressed the creamy petals of a magnolia blossom that brushed her shoulder. "Isn't it a glorious morning! All blue and gold and green. Everything looks as though it had been scrubbed, and the air sprayed with perfume." Her voice lilted with the sheer joy of living, and then it deepened, "I can't realize the awful thing that happened last night: that Katherine can't see all this; that she will never see anything again."

"You knew her?" John jerked.

"Not well." Carol noticed the shadow that seemed once more to have settled on his clear-cut face. "We met her in Honolulu and saw quite a bit of her there. I didn't exactly like her—but she was always so terribly vital. I never knew anyone who seemed to enjoy life as she did. Even though she was out of a job and broke, nothing seemed to worry her. She just breezed along, laughing and having a good time."

The Englishman's sensitive mouth hardened, and his voice was once more formal as he opened the door of the bungalow and stood aside for her to enter.

"I will open the shutters and give you some light. Then I'll wait out here until you are ready."

Distressed by the change in his manner, Carol started to speak, and then, thinking better of it, merely nodded.

John's thoughts were bitter as he stood by the veranda rail gazing over the tangle of trees and vines that glutted the valley below. He reproached himself because for a few minutes, the chatter of a stranger had blotted out the memory of Gerry sprawled across his bed in a drunken slumber, his perspiring face an unhealthy red; the despair in Helen's dark blue eyes; worst of all the realization of his own futility; the way he had failed the two people he cared for most on earth. That policeman couldn't have been serious in his insinuations about Gerry. Or was he? What had Gerry been doing? Sleep anyway had been impossible, and at the first streak of rose across the lightening sky, John had left his hot rumped bed in search of a bath. The tepid water had done him no good, nor had his aimless walk through the glistening morning. His eyes were still heavy, and his mind sluggish, just when it should be working most keenly. He had found himself at the little shed-like station, and had stayed there watching the gang of coolies plodding up the steep railway track; their yellow, bulging shoulders bent forward to maintain their balance; the jabbering of their excited tongues blown toward him by the breeze that all too soon would die. They looked like a troop of trained apes, but

their voices were more guttural and sing-song than those of the monkeys chattering in the treetops. Impatient at his own inertia, he had turned back to the hotel. Perhaps Gerry's spirit wouldn't be so inaccessible this time when he shook him. It was essential that he should hear his brother's story before the youngster had to face the police. His immediate intention of arousing Gerry, however, had been thwarted by the sudden appearance of the American girl, and her appeal to him. During the walk down to her bungalow, she had diverted his thoughts all too successfully from the murder, and the seriousness not only of his predicament but what was more important to him, that of Gerry and Helen. Unconsciously he had probably been using her bright chatter as a shield against the battering of his emotions, until she had paid that funny little tribute to the dead woman. Joy of living! He couldn't afford to think of the Lowell woman as anything but an inhuman monster, whose death meant a release to better, finer people.

"Here I am, armed for the fray!" A gay voice yanked him back to the present as Carol, immaculate in blue linen, her hair a sheen of gold, glowed against the dark doorway.

His glance was so sombre and impersonal that she felt suddenly abashed. Soberly Carol preceded him along the little trail. The stillness of the morning was broken by the sound of footsteps tramping along the main path and a startled exclamation in Chinese as the girl emerged from the screen of shrubbery. Four

Chinese boys were passing, and suspended on a litter between them was a doll-like figure that tossed from side to side with each uneven lurch of the bearers.

"Oh!" Carol gasped, shrinking back against the wet bushes.

John stepped forward, his face whitening as he saw the contents of the litter. "Si-apa itu?"¹ His voice was hoarse.

"Mem wayong ketchil!"² one of the boys called over his shoulder as the procession proceeded stolidly on its way.

"Good God!" The Englishman muttered in a shocked, helpless tone.

"What is it? Who is it?" Carol shook his arm.

"The little dancer."

"She's dead?" The girl's voice quavered.

John nodded, and then said sharply, "We'd better get along to the hotel."

"I don't understand," Carol protested. "She was upstairs. How did she get out here? What happened?"

"I don't know," he said in harsh impatience. He was too bewildered by this latest tragedy, too fearful of its consequence to answer questions.

"She said last night that someone had tried to push her over the cliff. Do you suppose she was murdered? Or do you think she killed herself?" Carol persisted.

"I don't know." John seemed to be hurrying away from Carol's speculations, and she had to quicken her steps to keep up with him. Silence fell between them,

¹ "Who is that?"

² "The little dancing mem."

a silence peopled with the ghosts of Helen, Gerry and Bob, and the effect upon them of this latest tragedy.

Word of the second murder had apparently percolated through the hotel, and by the time Carol and John entered the dining-hall, the guests, with the exception of Gerry Townsend, were gathered in excited groups. The early morning sun streamed into the room, falling in golden patches on the white tables and speckled marble floors, but instead of dissipating the horror, it seemed merely to accentuate it. There was a chilled atmosphere of suspicion which defied the best efforts of the mounting tropic sun. The guests reacted characteristically to the news. Despite the early hour, George Blake was gulping down a brandy and soda. Clarence Goodrich was lighting cigarette after cigarette only to let them die out between his lips and with trembling fingers crush them into an ash tray. Dick Stevenson, oblivious of Madge's sobbing, was staring with hard eyes at each segregated group. Henry Pennington was pacing back and forth, gnawing at his close-cropped moustache. Bob was talking in low, anxious tones to Diane, while Lady Pennington showed her disturbance only by a lessening of her jealous chaperonage of her daughter and husband. Helen Goodrich had slumped into the nearest chair, her slim white hand shielding from view the desperation in her lowered eyes. Young Mike Goodrich was strutting back and forth, his hands in the pockets of fresh, abbreviated shorts, his eyes sparkling, and his lips tightly shut as though distrustful of what he might say.

Carol stopped just inside the door as John limped hastily to Helen's side and spoke to her in a soft, urgent voice. The American girl's gaze wandered from person to person. They all looked so familiar, so civilized, and yet, one among them was a murderer.

The office door opened, and an electric shock seemed to go through the room as Campbell, followed by Ismael entered the dining-hall. His eyes were shrewd and comprehensive as they rested in turn on each face before him. It seemed hours before he spoke. "There has been another murder committed. Some time early this morning, Miss Page was brutally killed."

At the starkness of his announcement, a shiver of dread rippled over the assembled guests, but before anyone had time to speak the officer continued, "You had all better make yourselves comfortable. There are a number of points I wish to clear up." He waited until most of the guests were seated, and then resumed. "As I understand, Miss Page went to her room when the other women retired. That was about quarter of eleven. You men were supposed to be on guard from then until we arrived. I want to know which of you saw Miss Page leave the hotel." His gaze challenged each man present, but there was no reply to his question.

The officer's lips tightened. "Very well then, we'll approach it from another angle. Which of the men supposed to be on guard at the entrances to the hotel, left his post last night?"

Bob gulped audibly, and then with a voice which

he vainly tried to make steady said, "I left the front entrance, as I told you, just before you arrived, to get some cigarettes. I wasn't gone very long."

"What time was that?"

"About quarter of three."

Campbell grunted. "That was the only time you were away from the front of the hotel?"

"Yes, sir."

The officer turned to Blake. "You had the rear, Mr. Blake. Did you leave it all during the night?"

The salesman's red-rimmed eyes met his squarely. "No, sir. I sat smoking on the rear steps from the time I took my post until Mr. Pennington came along and told me to come inside, after you got here. I wasn't taking any chances on any of the chinks slipping away."

A look of dismay had settled on Dick Stevenson's face, and he visibly braced himself for Campbell's next question. "Mr. Stevenson, did you leave the side entrance?"

He nodded slowly, groping for words with which to excuse himself. "Yes, I did. Just after I went outside, my wife called down and asked me to fasten her shutters for her. Her room was on the side just above me. It never occurred to me that I ought to stay below—I thought I could keep an eye on things while I was closing the blinds."

"How long were you away?"

"Not long. I don't know exactly. I pulled the shutters close, and then Kit, my wife, was upset, a bit

hysterical, and I had to get her some water and calm her down. It couldn't have taken me more than fifteen or twenty minutes at the most."

"That must have been when she left, tuan," Ismael whispered "Some time between eleven o'clock and eleven-fifteen or twenty." Campbell nodded his agreement, and returned to his questioning of Stevenson.

"Did you see or hear anything while you were upstairs, or later when you came down?"

"No, nothing. It was very dark and rainy."

The officer shifted his attack, and Lady Pennington gave a surprised start as he addressed her. "Lady Emily, are all the straps on your baggage?"

"Really, I couldn't tell you." Her voice was cold and remote.

Diane looked up quickly. "Mother, one of them is missing,—the one off your big black suitcase. I noticed that it was gone yesterday when you sent me to get a handkerchief."

Lady Emily glared at her daughter before she said in a firm tone, "If it is, I know nothing about it."

"Do you recognize this strap, Lady Emily?"

With a swift jerk the officer dangled a black, snake-like object from his hand. Lady Pennington raised her lorgnette calmly and surveyed it. "I really couldn't tell you. All such articles are alike, and I object to being questioned in this fashion."

"You can't explain then, how your strap was found around the neck of Miss Lowell?"

A gasp of horror breathed through the room, and even Lady Emily seemed taken aback for a second before she replied. "Certainly not. I don't admit that the strap is mine. I ordered the room boy to air all my luggage. This atrocious climate had mildewed it. He left the suitcases and bags on the veranda in the sun."

"The strap is yours, Lady Emily. Ismael found that it matched exactly the one which is still on your suitcase. When did you have the room boy air your baggage?"

"On Thursday." Her attitude was less aggressive than it had been. "All of our luggage remained outside until evening."

"You are implying that someone took the strap without your knowledge?"

"Obviously." She seemed to dismiss the subject.

Once more the officer scanned the group before him. If the murderer had taken the strap, he couldn't expect an admission, and furthermore, if the strap was taken on Thursday, it eliminated automatically the two Townsend brothers, and Blake, all of whom arrived later in the week. Ismael's dark, almond-shaped eyes were fixed on the small, uneasy face of Mike Townsend, who was shifting nervously from one short leg to the other.

"I think the anak knows something about it, tuan," the Malay said softly.

Mike swallowed hard, and then blurted out, "I took the strap." His father made an angry gesture toward him, and Helen's eyes widened with sudden fear.

"Tell us about it, Mike." Campbell's voice was gentle, and the youngster turned gratefully to him.

"I was making a lasso," he began slowly, "like the cowboys use in America. I didn't have any rope, so I used straps. I took all of ours, but the lasso wasn't long enough to whirl, the way Will Rogers does in the cinema, you know. Then I just happened to see all that baggage on the veranda, so I took one strap—that was all I needed. I was going to put it back, truly I was."

His eyes shifted from the indignant glare of Lady Emily, to the grim face of his father, and then back to Campbell who asked, "What happened to the strap?"

"I don't know," Mike admitted. "Dad saw my lasso and made me put all our straps back. I stuck the black one in my pocket. I never thought of it again until you pulled it out just now."

Lady Emily snorted. Carol and Bob exchanged an amused look, but Helen Goodrich's face was tragic. She could feel that strap tightening around the neck, not of Katherine Lowell, but of her own husband, Mike's father.

Campbell was disconcerted. For a moment he thought he had narrowed down the suspects, but now they were all back in the ring. Any of them might have picked up the strap. "When did you last see the strap, Mike, can you remember?" He asked patiently.

Mike looked worried. "I don't know. I just put it in my pocket and forgot it."

The officer turned to Helen. "Did you see the strap, Mrs. Goodrich?"

Helen shook her head, "No, Miss Hancock dresses him. She might know about it."

"She does not dress me," Mike's indignant voice cut in. "She isn't even in the room when I dress. All she does is put out the clothes for me, the way Semut does for daddy. I do the rest myself. I'm not a baby."

His father bent a threatening face over him. "If Mr. Campbell is through talking to you, you are to go right out of here, and stay out. I'll attend to you later."

"The governess again," Campbell muttered to Ismael. "All trails seem to lead back to her, and Dr. Turner won't let me talk to her, damn his eyes. He's sending a nurse up to look after her. It may be days before we can find out what she knew about the Lowell woman, whether she had the strap, and how she really got that bump on her head."

CHAPTER IX

PENNINGTON cleared his throat. "Would you mind telling us how and where Miss Page met her death?" he inquired. "We are still in the dark about everything except the fact that she was killed."

"Her body was discovered early this morning, in the gully beside the bungalow occupied by Mr. Goodrich. She had apparently been killed with a blunt weapon of some sort, and her body tossed down the bank." Campbell stared intently as he spoke into the shocked, troubled faces around him.

Pennington frowned. "What did she go out for? I warned her to stay locked in her room." He resumed his restless pacing. "This is dreadful,—it makes me feel responsible for her death. After all, I was in charge."

"I told you to keep out of this affair, Henry," Lady Emily said. Her husband winced at the note of triumph in her voice.

"Well, we have discovered how and when—approximately—Miss Page left the hotel," Campbell resumed. "We know from the condition of her clothing that it was before the rain stopped, so she must have slipped out while Mr. Stevenson was upstairs and the side entrance was unguarded. The next question is how she managed to get to Mr. Goodrich's bungalow without

being seen along the path. Mr. Courtney, your post along the front of the hotel commands a view of the path as far as the bend. Are you sure you didn't see her?"

Bob shook his head. "No, but there is a short cut from the side porch through the bushes. She might have used that path. It opens on to the main path just beyond the bend. If she went that way, I couldn't have seen her."

"Mr. Goodrich." Helen stiffened as the officer addressed her husband. "How did it happen that you didn't meet Miss Page? You were supposed to patrol the path from your bungalow to the hotel."

Clarence lighted another cigarette. "If she left the hotel shortly after the women retired, it must have been either while I was in our bungalow with Miss Hancock, or after Semut and I had brought her up here. I certainly didn't pass her along the way. It is also possible that she was on the short cut as we came along the main path."

"How long did it take you to get Miss Hancock?"

The planter paused to consider. "I couldn't tell you exactly. I went down to the bungalow as soon as Mr. Pennington told us to take our posts. I couldn't arouse Miss Hancock by knocking on her door and calling her, and when I finally opened it and went in, I found her on the floor. She was unconscious, and I supposed at first that she had fainted. I got some water and some smelling-salts, and when that didn't do any good, I routed out Semut to help me carry

her up to the hotel. That must have taken us about half an hour. When we got her up to her room here, I called Mrs. Goodrich and explained the situation. Then I got hold of the clerk to get us some quinine, and sent one of the boys for hot water and ice bags. That took fifteen or twenty minutes more."

Campbell nodded, "In other words, you were occupied between forty-five and fifty minutes. Did you meet anyone on your way back to the bungalow, or during the rest of the time you were on guard?"

"No one but Mr. Pennington. He stopped by several times."

"How about Semut? Where was he?"

"He was panicky, and asked permission to spend the night in the servants' quarters here at the hotel."

"Did you see anything of young Gerry Townsend?"

John braced himself for the reply to the question he had been dreading.

"We walked down from the hotel together, John and Gerry and I, when I went to get Miss Hancock. They left me at my bungalow, and went on. I didn't see either of them again."

Campbell turned to John Townsend. "Your brother is still—er—incapacitated, Mr. Townsend?"

John bowed.

"How long do these spells last, as a rule?"

"It depends upon the amount he has had to drink. I tried to arouse him before I went out this morning, but it was no use. If you would like me to, I'll take another shot at it now."

The officer hesitated for a second before he replied. "No. He can wait. I don't want to waste time on him until he can give a clear statement. Now about yourself. Did you see or hear anything while you were down at the fourth bungalow?"

"No one but Gerry and Mr. Pennington."

"How many times did you see your brother? He was supposed to patrol the path between the Goodrich bungalow and the one where you were stationed."

Reluctantly, as though the words were being dragged from him, John said, "I saw Gerry just once after he left me. I thought that the shock of Miss Lowell's death had sobered him up—he had seemed quite himself while we were down here at the bungalow, and later at the hotel when Mr. Pennington was mapping out the patrols."

"How did he seem the last time you saw him down at the bungalow?"

John flushed. "He had difficulty in walking, and his speech was blurred. I was surprised. I suppose he got some more liquor from some place, but it wasn't from the bar, because I inquired of the bar boy when I went to look for Gerry, after you took over the bungalow."

"You yourself heard nothing while you were on duty? No scream, no sound of a struggle?"

"No. The noise of the rain and the wind would have cut off all sound unless it was close at hand."

John's taut figure relaxed as the officer turned to address the manufacturer. "Mr. Pennington, how do

you account for the fact that you didn't see Miss Page while you were circulating between the various posts?"

The older man looked troubled. "That's what I have been trying to figure out. I don't see how I could have missed her, for I was back and forth along the path at least a dozen times. My only explanation is that she must deliberately have avoided me. My rounds were fairly regular, and if anyone was interested enough to keep track, the assailant could have timed the murder while I was at back of the hotel speaking to Mr. Blake, or while I was at the end of my trek, with Mr. Townsend. On the same score, Miss Page could have slipped through the short cut as I came along the main path. She knew that I would have protested against her being outdoors. There are bushes and trees all along the path, you know. If anyone wished to step aside until I had passed, I wouldn't have seen him, or her."

"It must have happened that way," Campbell agreed. "Unfortunately so many people passed along the trail that it is impossible to distinguish the murderer's footprints. Did you cover the short cut, Ismael?" he asked his assistant.

"Yes, tuan. There were several marks of a woman's heel, but all else was blurred by the rain. It was merely because her heels were high, and sunk deep in the mud, that I could distinguish them."

"Pardon me, Mr. Campbell," Pennington interrupted. "That clue Miss Page discovered,—did you find that?"

"No," the officer admitted. "She may have been

killed in order to keep it from us. I think when we know who killed Miss Lowell, we will have Miss Page's murderer too. Mr. Blake!"

George Blake looked up startled, and his empty glass thudded over on to the table cloth as he set it down.

"Ismael has checked up on the bar records, and he finds that you ordered five whisky sodas yesterday afternoon."

The salesman nodded, "I told you I had had quite a few. What about it?"

"Just this. The last drink was brought to you at seven o'clock. At seven-thirty, when the room boy brought your hot water for shaving, you were not in your room. Where were you?"

Blake's eyes blinked behind his spectacles. "I must have been taking a bath. I found the water by the wash-stand when I came back. I didn't have a private bath, so I had to use one of the public ones at the end of the hall."

"Sure you weren't outside the hotel? Weren't down interviewing your wife, for instance?"

"No, I didn't leave the hotel from the time I entered it, until I accompanied these other gentlemen down to the bungalow later."

Campbell consulted his notes. "What did you mean, Mr. Blake, by your exclamation: 'Katherine. I was too late, my girl—Oh, my poor girl!'"

Blake fidgeted in his chair. "I don't remember saying that, but I may have. I was upset. If I said

it, I meant nothing by it—just the feeling perhaps that if I had seen her sooner, it mightn't have happened."

"How do you figure that?" Campbell asked with interest.

"I don't know. Perhaps my seeing her wouldn't have made any difference, but then again, perhaps it would. All I know is that when I saw her lying there like that, I just remembered she was the girl I had married, and that I ought to have taken better care of her. I'll never forgive myself." The honest emotion in his voice impressed everyone, with the possible exception of Lady Emily, who was staring out of the window as though to dissociate herself from the whole affair.

"Mrs. Goodrich!"

Helen's face quivered at the sound of her name.

"Was your son's governess acquainted with Miss Lowell?"

Helen caught her breath in surprise, or perhaps in relief, and then said quickly, "I don't know. She may have been. As I told you, I know very little about Miss Hancock. She kept to herself, and as a rule preferred to have her meals down in the bungalow. I don't remember seeing her speak to Miss Lowell, but she had her evenings to herself after the boy went to bed, and she used to go for walks. She had every Wednesday off, and on those days, there have only been two since we came up here,—she went down to Penang."

"Where did Miss Hancock come from, do you know?"

"Her home was in South Africa somewhere. She told me she left there after her mother died, and came to Singapore. She had several very good references from women there whose children she had cared for. She might have met Miss Lowell in Singapore, or perhaps even further back than that,—I don't know."

"Did you know Miss Lowell?" Campbell shifted his attack.

"I had met her." Helen's voice was calm, but her tiny handkerchief was squeezed into a damp ball between her restless fingers. Her husband's hand shook as he pressed out a freshly lighted cigarette in the littered ash tray.

"You didn't know her well then. Not as well as your husband did?"

John Townsend started angrily, and then, as though realizing that anything he might say would merely complicate matters for Helen, dropped back into his chair.

"Not so well, no," Helen's smile was gallant. "I don't go out very much."

"Did you object to your husband's friendship with Miss Lowell?" Campbell was watching her with narrowed eyes. Clarence wiped his perspiring forehead, as he waited with caught breath for Helen's reply. Helen glanced at him. He looked exactly like her naughty little son. A smile flickered on her lips.

"No!" her answer was firm. "I know my husband, and I trust him. In his business he comes in contact with many people whom I don't know." Clarence's face worked, and he turned his head away to hide his feelings.

Campbell dropped the subject for the time being, and asked, "How long was your husband upstairs with you last evening after he brought Miss Hancock to the hotel?"

Helen shifted to an easier position. "About half an hour, I should say, perhaps a little more or less. I don't know exactly. He got some quinine from the clerk, and sent the boy for some things—hot water bags first, for I supposed she merely had malaria. When I discovered the bump on the back of her head, I knew she ought to have ice bags for that. She is larger than I, too, and he had to help me get her raincoat off, and put her into bed. It is difficult to gauge the time accurately." Her face was serene, her charming voice clear, but an involuntary jerk on her handkerchief tore it in two.

"Thank you, Mrs. Goodrich. That will be all for the present."

John Townsend eased the grip with which he had been clutching the arms of his chair. Clarence stepped quickly to his wife's side, and murmured something softly in her ear. For a second his hand rested caressingly on her shoulder.

"Mr. Goodrich," Campbell's voice intervened. "Your wife has corroborated your statement, but your

activities at the hotel by no means afford an alibi. We don't know the time when Miss Page was killed. All that we know is that it was some time before the rain stopped, but that didn't happen until two-thirty. Apparently she left the hotel shortly after eleven o'clock. There was plenty of time for you to have met her after you had finished your ministrations to Miss Hancock."

Helen's face was frozen, and her body seemed to shrink under the impact of the officer's words as though they were lashes. She had done the best she could for her husband. Or had she? There was one final sacrifice she might make. Should she permit tradition, honour, or even self-respect to count in the balance with the safety of the man she loved? If only she had time to think, but Campbell's inexorable voice went on, ignoring Clarence's denials.

"According to many statements, Miss Lowell's behaviour for the last few days has been deliberately embarrassing to you. Yesterday afternoon, one of the Chinese boys saw you down at Miss Lowell's bungalow, and overheard you quarrelling with her. In fact, your last words as you left the house were that you would be back later. Your alibi, for the time of Miss Lowell's murder, depends solely upon the statement of Miss Hancock, who is unconscious. We find that your boy Semut was with some of the servants here in the hotel, so that he can't vouch for you. Furthermore, I have a witness who saw Miss Hancock leave the bungalow about quarter of eight. Ten minutes later,

one of the bar boys who had carried down a bottle of whisky to Miss Lowell passed you on the steps of the bungalow. At least," the officer corrected himself, "he says he passed a tall tuan in a raincoat and soft hat, going into the bungalow, and that the man had a dark moustache."

There was desperation in the glance Clarence turned toward his wife, and it was to her he appealed. "Helen, I didn't do it. You believe me, don't you?"

Helen shuddered. Then as though her struggle was over she straightened her shoulders. At that moment she cared for nothing in the world except Clarence, her weak, foolish husband. Her voice was clear, though in her own ears it sounded far away, as far away as England, her childhood and her playmates.

"Of course I believe you. I know that it was not you who went to that bungalow last night." She turned to face the officer. "It was not my husband, Mr. Campbell, it was Mr. John Townsend."

CHAPTER X

THE room buzzed with excitement, and all eyes shifted quickly from Helen's white face to that of the man she accused. After his first start, John sat motionless, but sharp new lines seemed to etch themselves around his tight lips. Helen's betrayal seemed to have stunned him. Carol Courtney watched him in an agony of pity. "The cat!" she whispered, clenching her brown fists and glaring at Helen, who had slumped back in her chair.

Campbell recovered from his surprise. "Is it true, Mr. Townsend, that you saw Miss Lowell last night?"

"Quite true." John's tone was flat and emotionless.

"What time did you see her?"

"About ten minutes of eight, I should say. I left the hotel at seven-forty, and I walked slowly."

"How well did you know Miss Lowell?"

"I didn't know her at all."

"Why did you go to see her then?"

"On a personal matter. It had nothing to do with the murder. She was alive when I left."

"Were you acting on behalf of someone else?" the officer asked shrewdly.

John remained silent.

"Mr. Townsend, I'm afraid you don't realize your position—that you are the last person to have seen

the woman alive. Surely you owe it to yourself to explain your motive in going to her." Campbell's voice was urgent.

"I wasn't the last person to see her. She was very much alive when I left. I didn't kill her." John's calm was unruffled.

"Of course you would say that. Have you any proof that she was alive? What time did you leave her?"

"I wasn't there long. Not more than ten minutes."

"You won't tell us why you went to see this woman you didn't know,—a woman who was strangled either while you were still in the bungalow, or shortly after you left?"

"I can tell you nothing. I can't expect you to accept my word for the fact that I didn't kill her. If you believe I did it, you can arrest me," John said wearily. "I've nothing to add to my statement."

Campbell uttered an impatient exclamation, and half rose to his feet. "Wait, tuan," Ismael whispered, touching his sleeve. The Malay's narrow eyes were on the American girl. Oblivious of the police, her gaze was turning from John's impassive face to the interested, carefree countenance of her young brother who was bending solicitously over the back of Diane's chair. With a gesture of finality, she lifted her firm little chin, and her clear young voice rang out.

"Mr. Townsend may not be able to prove that Miss Lowell was alive when he left her, but I can."

Bob Courtney looked up started, bewilderment on

his boyish countenance. John Townsend shifted his position and watched the straight little blue-clad figure as the girl rose and faced the police inspector. Campbell frowned. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that I passed John Townsend last night on the path leading from the bungalow to the main trail. He didn't see me. I stepped aside into the bushes and watched him. He turned left, along the path that goes around the hill, instead of turning right toward the hotel."

John tried to remember. She was right about his turning left. He had been so shaken by his interview with the Lowell woman that he hadn't wanted to meet anyone. Dimly he recalled having passed a native boy on the veranda steps, but he had seen no signs of this girl who had come to his rescue.

"That doesn't mean very much, I'm afraid, Miss Courtney," Campbell's voice was gentle. "We know Mr. Townsend must have left in time to get here for dinner. He could have killed her during the few minutes he was in the bungalow."

"That isn't all I have to tell you," Carol said, her hazel eyes meeting the officer's squarely.

"My God, Kay. Don't!" Bob exclaimed. "You told me to keep my mouth shut, and here you are spilling everything."

Carol looked at him. "It is different now, Bob. We can't stand by and see an innocent man accused, just to save our own skin. We are only Americans, but we have our own standards of decency." She stared

at Helen until the blue eyes met hers, and then wavered away. Apparently satisfied, Carol resumed her story.

“I’d better begin at the beginning——” She waited for Campbell’s nod of permission, and then went on. “My brother and I met Miss Lowell in Honolulu, as I believe he told you. We saw quite a little of her there. She was a very good sport, always peppy, and ready to go places and do things at any hour of the day or night. You probably don’t know it, but my brother is very susceptible. He was impressed not only with Katherine’s high spirits, but with the fact that she had thrown up a perfectly good job in order to take care of Hester Page, who was too sick with fever to leave when the show they were with pulled out. Not many girls would have done that, and we both felt she deserved a lot of credit. I noticed after a couple of weeks that Bob seemed to be getting himself in pretty deep, and somehow, although I had nothing against Katherine I couldn’t see her as Bob’s wife. She was older than he, and too sophisticated, so I just pulled up stakes and dragged him away. I didn’t know it at the time, but, like a dumb-bell, he had written her some sloppy letters after we left, and before he fell for the little nurse on the boat.” Bob flushed, and edged self-consciously away from Diane. Carol’s lips quirked at his action. “Fortunately, the nurse got off at Singapore, but we kept right on going to Java. I thought he’d be safe among the Dutch women there. As luck would have it, though, when we eventually arrived here in the

Penang Hills, the first person we saw was Katherine. By that time, Bob seemed to be completely off her, and I didn't think he was in any danger. A couple of days ago, I noticed that he was looking worried. He put me off each time I tried to find out what the trouble was. Yesterday at tiffin, I saw Katherine slip something into his hand when she came into the dining-room. Later, when he thought I was busy with my lunch, he pulled it out behind his napkin and looked at it. I was watching out of the corner of my eyes, and I saw him get pale, and jam it back into his pocket. I didn't say anything, but in the afternoon, when I went in his room to see whether he was ready for tea, I found he'd gone out. His clothes were strewn all about, and under a chair I saw the note. It wasn't very decent of me to read it, but I know Bob, and I have to keep one jump ahead of him all the time. The note, of course, was from Katherine, and in it she said she knew he would be interested to learn that she was still treasuring his letters—and treasuring was right. She implied very cagily that he might have them—at a price. I knew then where he had gone. I knew, too, that he would bungle things. Sure enough, when I saw him later, his face was a mile long. I waited for him to say something to me, but he didn't,—just avoided me, and that is always ominous. I dressed early for dinner, and after he had gone up to the hotel for a game of billiards, I decided I'd go down and tackle Katherine myself. It must have been nearly eight when I set out, for I wanted to be sure that

Bob wouldn't come back and stop me. I walked along the edge of the path so that if he passed me, he wouldn't see who I was. When I saw Mr. Townsend come out of the bungalow, I thought it was Bob—that he had pulled a fast one on me and gone to see Katherine again instead of going to the hotel. After Mr. Townsend was out of sight, I went right into the bungalow, and found Katherine in bed, propped up with pillows and looking like Madame Recamier or someone in a French novel. I asked her what the big idea was in trying to scare Bob. She looked up and grinned at me. She had a nice smile, sort of wide and spontaneous, and her teeth were beautiful." For the first time Carol faltered at the memory her words conjured.

"And then," prompted Campbell.

"She said a strange thing. I think perhaps it was the highest compliment that was ever paid me." Carol's voice was low. "She said, 'I always knew you were a gentleman. Most people, women especially, wouldn't have seen through my bluff.' Her eyes twinkled up at me, and she made a motion with her hand. 'The letters are there in my suitcase. Help yourself.'

"I tried to thank her, but she cut me short, saying, 'He's a nice kid, you know, and he was darn decent to me in Honolulu when I needed a friend, but he is too free with his pen. I thought he'd better learn his lesson from me. Why, do you know,' her eyes opened very wide, 'those damn fool letters would be worth ten thousand dollars to most women!'

"I told her what a swell person I thought she was. I meant it, too, and then I took the letters and went away."

"She didn't get out of bed? She was still in her own room?" Campbell asked.

"Yes. The letters, there were only four of them, were together in a little packet in the top of her suitcase. She pointed them out to me, after I'd pulled the suitcase out from under the bed and opened it. I thanked her again, and explained that I had to hurry along because Bob would be looking for me, and I didn't want him to know yet that I had the letters. I planned to let him worry a little. She watched me put the letters in my pocket, and then waved good-bye as I went out of the room. I looked back before I closed the door. She was leaning back against the pillows looking very pleased with herself. Her face wasn't hard at all, and I thought then that she seemed younger than I had imagined her. It may just have been the light, though."

Thoughtfully Campbell stroked his long chin. "You have the letters I suppose, Miss Courtney?"

Carol shook her head, "No, I haven't. I destroyed them as soon as I could."

"How? Where?"

"I stopped at the bungalow and tore them into little bits. Then I burnt them in an ash tray and blew the ashes out of my bedroom window."

"Did your brother know you had the letters?"

"Not until later. I knew he needed a lesson. He

was as nervous as a witch all during dinner—trying to put me off by talking at the rate of a mile a minute. After I heard about the murder, I tried to speak to him, but there wasn't an opportunity. I didn't want to have him making any breaks about the letters, or try to look for them. He told me later that he had rummaged around to see if he could find them when he was down in the bungalow with the other men. Mr. Goodrich suspected something of the sort, Bob said."

"When did you tell your brother about the letters?"

"About quarter of three this morning."

"So it wasn't cigarettes he was after, when he went up to your room?"

Carol smiled, and John noticed for the first time that she had a dimple in one cheek.

"Oh yes it was. He would never have remembered that I wanted to speak to him if he hadn't run out of cigarettes."

Bob looked sheepish, and behind the bulwark of her mother's back, Diane reached out impulsively and patted the brown hand that was clutching his knee.

"Have you any witnesses who can corroborate this story of yours, Miss Courtney?"

"No. It wasn't the sort of thing I was proud of. I didn't want anyone to know about it. I wouldn't have told you about it even now, if it hadn't established an alibi for Mr. Townsend."

"I'm sure we all appreciate the way you came forward," the officer said. "But it doesn't actually vindicate Mr. Townsend. He might have returned to the bungalow after you left. On the other hand, your story shows that your brother had a motive for wishing Miss Lowell out of the way. That you, on behalf of your brother, had the same motive, and, what is more important, you had the opportunity for committing the crime."

Carol looked frightened. "But I didn't kill her. I wouldn't! We liked each other better than we ever had. She gave me the letters voluntarily!"

Bob sprang to his feet. "What the devil do you mean by talking to my sister like that?" he shouted, his tanned, boyish face crimson with rage. "If you have anything to say, say it to me."

"Don't, Bob, don't," Carol pleaded. "You will only make matters worse."

"Oh no I won't. If that cop is so damn dumb that he thinks you are a murderer, I'll hammer some sense into his thick head." Bob shook off the restraining hand that Diane laid on his arm, and started toward the front of the room. Campbell waited for him with an amused twinkle in his eyes.

With a swift, pantherlike movement, a squat brown figure suddenly blocked the American's path. Irrately Bob glanced down into Ismael's bland face. "Be tranquil, tuan," the little Malay said softly. "If your sister is innocent as you say, why be so perturbed. Only the guilty have cause to fear." Bob blinked, but

Carol noted with relief that his impulse to fight was checked.

"Well, why is he trying to pin the murder on Kay?" Bob muttered, "She didn't have to tell him anything, and when she came clean, of her own accord, he tries to accuse her or me, or maybe both of us."

"Sit down, tuan," Ismael's pressure on his arm was insistent. "There are many possibilities, many motives, many suspects. You and your sister are just two more. In the end, however, justice will triumph. To us out here, she is not blind, you know, but all-seeing."

As Bob, still grumbling, dropped into the empty chair beside his sister, Ismael addressed the white officer. "Let us get the time element straight, tuan, if you don't mind."

Campbell was disappointed at Ismael's intervention. He felt that it would be a relief to come to grips with something tangible in this case, even something as prosaic as Bob's fist. He liked the way the youngster had come to his sister's defence, and he liked the way the girl had spoken up in behalf of John Townsend. If they weren't frank and above-board, they were playing a deep game, and playing it well, he decided.

"Do you know what time it was when you saw Mr. Townsend leave the bungalow, Miss Courtney?" the officer asked.

Carol was quiet for a minute, trying to remember. "I think it must have been about eight o'clock. I waited to be sure that Bob wasn't going to put in another appearance before I left, and I planned to see

Katherine about eight. I'd told Bob I'd meet him for dinner at eight-thirty."

"Does that check with your idea of the time, Mr. Townsend?" Campbell asked.

John Townsend passed a weary hand across his forehead. "Yes, I should think so. I left the hotel at exactly twenty minutes of eight, and I walked slowly. I wasn't in the bungalow more than eight or ten minutes."

The officer nodded. "So far, so good. Now, Miss Courtney, how long do you think you were with Miss Lowell? Did you notice the time you left?"

Carol frowned. "No," she said slowly. "I was only there a short time. I went straight back to our bungalow, and burned the letters, then I brushed my hair and powdered my nose, and went up to the hotel. The big clock in the hall chimed the half hour. I remember hearing it as I went up the steps, and thinking that for once in my life I hadn't kept Bob waiting."

"If you did all those things, you certainly couldn't have spent much time with Miss Lowell," Campbell agreed, then added thoughtfully, "If you left the bungalow at ten minutes past eight, and the boy got there at eight-thirty, the woman must have been killed during those twenty minutes. I don't see how he could have gone along that path without meeting some of you."

Ismael's low voice interrupted. "You are forgetting one thing, tuan. The murderer may have been in hiding. Remember the little anak saw him pass just

about eight o'clock going toward the bungalow, and the waiter passed someone leaving it when he went down."

The officer looked discontented. "That's drawing it pretty fine, Ismael. Granting that the murderer waited in the shrubbery until Miss Courtney came out of the bungalow at ten minutes after eight, he still had to enter the bungalow, establish contact with Miss Lowell, kill her, look through her belongings, and get away inside of fifteen minutes. Otherwise the boy couldn't have met him where he claimed to."

The attention of the group was withdrawn by the opening of the hall door.

"Here he is!" piped Mike. "I got him for you."

The slim, white-clad figure of Gerry Townsend swayed on the threshold.

Mike propped his charge against the door-jamb, and beamed proudly at the surprised officers. "It was quite a job, waking him. It took ten pitchers of icewater."

Gerry groaned at the recollection, and Mike went on, "He has a bad headache. That's why his coat is all wet. I put a cloth on his head, the way mother does, but it dripped. Here's his shoes. I couldn't get them on." He held out a pair of mudstained evening pumps.

Diane giggled, and a ripple of amusement lightened the tenseness of the room at the picture presented by the usually immaculate Gerry. His fresh white suit was splashed with damp, grey patches, his light hair

was plastered to his head from a crooked parting, while his necktie, tied by inexperienced, boyish fingers was knotted near one ear.

"Clarence!" his father thundered. "I told you to keep out of here."

Mike looked aggrieved. "I'm only helping," he protested. "I didn't do anything you told me not to. I'm not even in the room now." He looked down at his small scuffed shoes to be sure they were still on the safe side of the threshold.

Gerry blinked and made an effort to stand erect. "Wha's it all about? Who wants me?" His blank, blue eyes roved about the room. John started forward, and Helen, who had hurried toward Mike, shrank aside as John passed her. Ignoring the appeal in her eyes, he helped Gerry into the chair which Ismael brought forward.

"I don't see why I can't stay here," Mike grumbled in answer to his mother's efforts to send him away. "I'm not in the room. I've just been helping the police. I've helped a lot, too, more than you know—more than anyone, haven't I?" he demanded of Ismael. The little Malay smiled down on him, and a brown hand patted the thin shoulder. "You have done well, but you must remember our agreement. There is work for you elsewhere," he whispered. "Try and find out where Semut was last night."

Mike's face lit up with pleasure, and without a word he scampered down the hall. Ismael closed the door and took a position beside it.

Campbell had moved his chair so that he now faced Gerry Townsend. "Just tell us in your own words, Mr. Townsend, where you were last night and what you did."

Gerry moved his head, and winced with pain. "I dunno. I was here and round about." He motioned vaguely with his hand.

"Try to remember," the officer urged.

"I'dunno. I had a few drinks." He frowned and then added with an air of triumph. "There were a lot of lights, and people millin' around. What was all the excitement, anyway?"

"Never mind that now. Try to think. Do you remember going out of here last night and walking in the rain?"

The blank eyes took on a gleam of life. "Yes, the rain. Beastly weather, what? That was why I started drinkin'. Nothing else to do in this potty place. I told that actress woman, what's her name? that we were the only live ones in the whole mausoleum."

A shock galvanized the guests at the casual mention of Katherine. John Townsend gripped the arm of his chair in sudden fear. Campbell leaned forward. "When did you tell her that?"

"Yes'day some time, or last night. I forget. It was down at her place. She had a bottle of Johnny Walker."

"Was it before dinner, or afterwards?" the officer asked patiently.

"I dunno. I wasn't feeling peckish. I just wanted coffee, and then something happened and I didn't get

it. Now what was that rumpus?" He ran distracted fingers through his hair, then shook his head. "I can't remember anything."

Campbell consulted his notes. "Your brother says you talked to him at dinner. You must have sobered up a little to have done that. Then you walked out in the rain with him. Where did you get the liquor afterwards?"

"Yes, the rain. Filthy weather yesterday. Funny, the rain feels warm coming down, and cold when it hits you. I was bitter cold and wet. Shivering. Then someone gave me a bottle. 'You're cold, man,' he said to me, 'you'll get a chill. Better take a little nip!'"

"When was this?" Campbell's eyes sparkled. At last he seemed to be getting somewhere.

"Last night. It was dark. He came up to me, like a good S'martan, and said, 'You'll get a chill, man, better take a nip!'"

"Who was the man?" the officer asked eagerly.

"I dunno. It was dark, I told you. I couldn't see his face. But he was a good scout—a reg'lar good S'martan."

"Was it someone you knew?"

"Must have been a friend of mine. A good fren' too. A stranger wouldn't have known how cold I was. A stranger wouldn't have put a whole bottle of whisky in my hand, and gone off. Didn't even take one drink himself. Gave it all to me."

"Did you drink the whole bottle?"

Gerry felt vaguely of his pockets. "Must have done.

It's gone. But it did the trick. I didn't get a chill. I'm all right—jus' a lil' headache." He glanced triumphantly around the group, and his eyes came to rest on the stern, unsympathetic face of his brother. "Even you couldn't mind my takin' a little nip to keep a chill off, John, could you now? Better'n havin' pneumonia, wasn't it? I wasn't goin' to have you sittin' up nights nursin' me with pneumonia?" Childish he seemed to be coaxing approval from his brother.

For another ten minutes Campbell tried to elicit some facts that would help him piece together the story of Gerry's evening, but without success. "Take him away," he exclaimed at last in despair to John. "Give him some strong, black coffee, and walk him around in the fresh air. I'll talk to him later." The officer untangled his long legs and rose from his chair. "The rest of you had better get some breakfast. Come along, Ismael." Without another glance, the officer stalked off toward the manager's office, followed by the pudgy little Malay.

The closing of the office door seemed to release the guests from the spell that had held them to the semi-circle of chairs. John, looking grim and worried, stooped over Gerry who, slumped sideways in his chair, with half-open mouth, was snoring gently. The rest of the party broke up into small, hostile groups at a cautious distance from each other.

Carol turned to Bob with a shiver. "Isn't it ghastly?"

"What?" Bob asked, wrenching his attention away from Diane, who was docilely following her mother and her stepfather to their table.

"Why, knowing that someone here in this room is a murderer, and wondering who it can be. Everyone looks so normal!" Her troubled eyes strayed from one man to another: John shaking Gerry to wakefulness; Mr. Pennington holding a chair for Lady Emily; George Blake bending over the menu that the Chinese waiter had placed in front of him; Dick Stevenson pulling out a neat square of handkerchief and passing it to the tearful Madge; Clarence Goodrich assuring Helen that he would locate Mike and bring him to breakfast. Nevertheless, in spite of their natural behaviour, there was tenseness in the room; fear and suspicion in the sidelong glances with which each group scanned the others.

"Bob," Carol clutched her brother's arm, "I'm afraid. Two women have been killed already. Suppose he keeps on killing? Which of us will be the next?"

CHAPTER XI

IN the oblong little office, located in the north-east corner of the dining-hall, Campbell was occupied with the same fear, as he paced back and forth between the door and window, his long legs mechanically avoiding the desk, two chairs and filing cabinet. "Two women killed, Ismael. Where is this thing going to stop? And if we are up against a homicidal maniac, how are we to protect the other guests?"

Ismael's brown eyes were murky with trouble. "I cannot bring myself to believe that he is a homicidal maniac, tuan. I think there is a definite plan behind both killings. If the little dancing mem hadn't discovered the identity of the man who killed her friend, I think she would still be alive. If we but knew why she left the safety of her room last night, we would know the murderer."

"That's just it," Campbell exclaimed. "There having been one attempt on her life, according to the story she told Pennington and the others, wouldn't you have thought she'd have sat tight until we got here? Ordinarily, you'd think, from the fact that she ventured forth at all, that the murderer was someone she knew and trusted, but from all Hang Hwa could find out from the servants she wasn't friendly with anyone except Miss Lowell. On the other hand, she

might have been trying to work a little blackmail game, and gone out last night to make the murderer pay through the nose. But that doesn't make sense either, because from everything I've learned, she was completely loyal to Miss Lowell, and determined to avenge her death. It's beyond me! Campbell threw out his hands in an awkward but expressive gesture.

"Let us approach the problem from another angle, tuan. If we could eliminate some of our suspects, we could concentrate all our efforts on those who are left."

"All right. Let's tackle it that way, and what have we? The obvious choice, I think, is Goodrich. She was his mistress, and he got tired of her—the old story. She followed him up here to Penang, admittedly to put pressure upon him, and she made him the laughing-stock of the place. He certainly had motive enough to kill her, and he has no alibi for the time when she was killed.

"Then, there is the husband, Blake. He wanted to be free to marry another woman. He hasn't any alibi either, and his story of staying in his room sounds pretty thin." Campbell was obviously thinking aloud.

"Take the American—Courtney. He says he was lying in a chair on the veranda here, but nobody can vouch for him. Furthermore, I understand that he is rather keen on the little English girl, and she isn't exactly indifferent to him, though the old lady would put thumbs down on any such *mésalliance*. Pennington is slated for a baronetcy, and the mother is anxious to

marry the girl into wealth and position. If the Lowell woman had letters from Courtney, she could have blown his hopes of marrying the English girl into next week.

“I’d like to know what John Townsend went down to see Miss Lowell about. He’s a fastidious sort of chap, I’d say, and ordinarily he’d be on the side of law and order. Perhaps that fool of a brother of his was in some sort of a jam with her, and he was trying to extricate him. And the brother! Lord what a mess he is in! No alibi—no memory—inclined to be aggressive when he is tight, and found practically on the scene of the second murder.

“To round out the circle, there is Stevenson who is newly-married to a jealous wife. Maybe those parties he admitted were harmless, and maybe they weren’t. If they weren’t, he might have killed her so that she wouldn’t peach to his wife. The more I see of matrimony, the gladder I am that I am single. Women certainly raise hell with a man, one way or another. Either they are all around your neck with a strangle-grip, or else they are clinging around the neck of some other chap—usually your best friend. I don’t know which is worse.”

Ismael’s mouth widened into a grin which displayed teeth surprisingly white for a Malay. “You white men make your big mistake right there, tuan. You class men and women separately, forgetting that before either one is a man or a woman, he or she is first a human being.”

Campbell shrugged away Ismael's theory. "Maybe, or maybe not. If you are right, then we can add the women here to our little list of suspects. A woman could have pulled off those murders as easily as a man."

Ismael looked thoughtful. "No, I don't feel that a woman committed these particular crimes. The only woman who is capable of it in this group is Lady Emily. She is completely ruthless, and strong enough mentally and physically to kill anyone who got in her way, but both these women were strangers to her and to her family, so she had no motive. The same is true of Tuan Pennington. He is clever enough to have committed the crimes, but why should he? There was no point of contact between them, though it might be well to check that. His statement about writing letters was true. There were two from his pen, in the mail pouch this morning. I think we may safely eliminate the other women. Mem Diane is too gentle,—like a reed in body and mind. Mem Stevenson——" he paused, groping for a simile. "She is like a tikus.¹

"Either Mem Courtney or Mem Goodrich might have committed the first murder. They have the same tenacious loyalty for those they love, but even if one of them had killed Mem Lowell, she would not have had the sustained emotion to do away with Mem Page. No one, of course, must escape our attention, but all of our evidence shows that it was a man who committed the crimes, and it is useless to waste time on the

¹ Mouse.

women. The little anak saw a man going toward the bungalow, and the Chinese boy saw him returning."

"The Chinese boy wasn't certain whether it was a man or a woman," Campbell objected.

"Betul,"¹ Ismael granted, "But the little boy was sure, and his eyes are as keen as a munyit's."² He paused for a moment to stare with unseeing eyes out of the window at the waving tops of the trees massed in the valley below, and then he went on slowly, "We have two nyirujarans.³ The sick governess, and Tuan Gerry Townsend whose mind is vacant. If we had the story of their evening, I think it would assist us greatly."

Campbell snorted his agreement. "I never saw such a case. Everyone lying to us about something, and as if that wasn't bad enough—a delirious woman we can't interview, and a drunk with no memory. He can't even tell us who gave him the bottle of whisky that put him out of the way. Damn clever move that, on the part of the murderer!" His tone betrayed reluctant admiration.

"You see, tuan, we must pit our wits against a killer who is not merely a careful planner, but one who is quick as a panther. The murder of Mem Lowell—anyone might have done that in a moment of rage; but the murder of Mem Page is different. It must have been planned after he knew she had found a clue to his identity, and in that short time, he devised a means of reaching her without detection. Remember

¹ True.

² Monkey's.

³ Riddles.

she had already been alarmed by one attempt on her life, and that there were guards, not only around the hotel, but along the paths. The vulnerable spot in the defence, of course, was Tuan Gerry. The murderer couldn't kill her in her room, nor in sight of the hotel, not where Tuan John Townsend was, nor where Tuan Goodrich was stationed, so he removes Tuan Gerry by giving him a bottle of whisky, which leaves the stretch of path from the Goodrich bungalow to that of Mem Lowell, unprotected. Even with so much accomplished, he still had to commit the murder in the interval when Tuan Pennington was safely away from the spot. Yet, he accomplished all of those things, making no sound and leaving no trace."

"You have accounted for all the men, Ismael," Campbell protested, "And that means the murderer would have to be an outsider, which neither of us believes."

"No, undoubtedly the murderer is one of the guests. I mentioned their stations as I did, because we do not yet know which is the criminal, but, unless he had an accomplice, and that I do not believe—any one of those men must have disposed of at least three others before he had a clear coast for Mem Page's murder."

The officer looked puzzled, and Ismael went on to explain. "If it was Tuan Townsend, for instance, he had to choose a moment when Tuan Stevenson was away from the side entrance, when Tuan Goodrich was upstairs with his wife and the governess, when Tuan Gerry was away from his post, and when Tuan

Pennington was patrolling another section. The same problem faced each suspect. He had to avoid being seen by at least three of four men who were supposedly watching for him."

"That's true enough, but I don't see that it helps us any."

"It helps us in this way, tuan. It shows us the sort of man who committed the murders," Ismael said quickly. "Now we have only the problem of discovering which of our suspects is clever enough to act as the murderer did."

"Well, who is your choice then, if it is as simple as that?" Campbell asked with a grim smile.

Ismael's brown face was serious, "I know much about the character of the murderer, tuan, but I do not yet know sufficient about the guests to identify him. We have no clue, save the strap, and from that we know nothing. I have despatched it to headquarters to find if there are fingerprints, but I have no hope of them. Our only real clue lies in the mind of the killer."

Campbell looked sceptical. "I haven't much faith in this psychological stuff. In my experience anyone is capable of a crime if he is driven far enough, and that applies to women as well as men."

"Betul," Ismael agreed. "But not everyone is capable of such crimes as these, and when we find the man who is, our troubles will be over."

The officer shrugged his bony shoulders. "You've pulled off some good stuff in your time, Ismael, I'll admit that, but I can't work the way you do. I have

to have something tangible: footprints, or fingerprints, or facts of some sort. Which reminds me, I've got some telephoning to do if the wire has been repaired. I'm going to find out from Singapore about the Goodriches, the Stevensons and the Townsends. I want to know whether Gerry Townsend is a woman chaser or not, and just how dangerous he is when he has been drinking. I want to find out how well Stevenson knew the Lowell woman, and whether Mrs. Goodrich cares enough about her husband to lie for him. Then I am going to cable England for a check on the Penningtons, and to Australia about Miss Lowell and Blake; to the Philippines to see what they know there about Miss Page, and to America for a line on the Courtneys. When I get the answers to those questions, I'll have something to work on."

He moved over to the desk and lifted the receiver of the telephone, his gaunt face relaxing as a singsong Eurasian voice requested the number. "It's all right, Ismael. Now we are going to start things," he said, settling into a chair while central put through his call to the Penang police headquarters. "Where are you off to?" The little Malay paused with his hand on the door. "I am going to get better acquainted with the murderer."

CHAPTER XII

To the inhabitants of the hotel the day seemed interminable. Slowly and relentlessly the sun moved up the heavens dispersing the dewy freshness of the morning, wilting the jasmine that garlanded the veranda rail, sapping the last bit of fragrance from the frangipani thickets, until even the bougainvillaea vines hung their vivid leaves in subjection. By noon the sun was in triumphant possession of all it surveyed, and the harried hotel manager was apologizing for a humid heat which he claimed was unique in his experience in the Penang Hills.

Breakfast had been unpleasant enough, but at least there had been an excited murmur of voices exchanging theories about the two murders which had helped to lessen the strain. Tiffin was decidedly worse, for by that time the guests had exhausted their speculations, and with no new rumours to engross them, ate their meal in a gloomy, suspicious silence.

As the sun slipped down the western sky a sea breeze sprang up, reviving not only the shrubbery and vines but also the jaded spirits of the people who assembled for tea on the rear veranda overlooking the Straits of Malacca. The women were carefully dressed in gaily-flowered chiffons, the men in fresh, white suits, and as they sat in cautiously segregated groups around the

wicker tables, they seemed to have forgotten temporarily the horror of the previous night. Heedless of the encroaching shadows which were so soon to revive their memories and pile up new fears, they drank in the salt breeze, and regarded each other with a tolerance almost genial. In that picturesque setting it was impossible to realize that there had been two murders committed, or that among the quiet, well-dressed guests there was a remorseless killer.

On the other side of one of the windows opening on to the rear veranda, through half-open shutters, Ismael was surveying the various groups of guests, while the tea tray sat neglected on the small table between him and Campbell. Bits of conversation came to his sharply-pointed ears in a confused medley: Lady Emily's sharp admonition to Diane as she intercepted an understanding glance from the American boy; Pennington's weary, "Oh, Emily, let the child alone!" Carol Courtney's, "You'll have to start girding up your loins right now, my gallant knight, if you expect to slay that dragon and rescue your new lady-love." Bob's sheepish, "Lay off, can't you? I'm serious this time, Kay!" Then his sister's laughing comment, "I won't believe that until you lose your appetite. No one who can eat two plates of sandwiches and six cakes can be in love!" Bob, rallying, "Hoist by your own petard that time, my girl. You haven't eaten a mouthful to-day."

At a table near the vine-twined railing, John Townsend was saying to the dejected Gerry, "This was

your last chance as far as I'm concerned. I'm going to book your passage back to England on the first boat. Apparently nothing but a 'cure' can do you any good, and the sooner you take it, the better for you and everybody else." Ismael could barely catch Gerry's low, "All right. I told you I'd do it. I thought I could pull myself together, but when that urge comes over me for a drink, nothing else seems to matter. You are so damn strong, John—you don't know what it's like. I did try——" His voice trailed off. John's reply was gentle, "I know, old man, it must be beastly, but I can't sit by and see you going to the dogs. You go home and take the cure, and then come back. We won't say anything to anyone about it. If the governor wants to retire, as he wrote, I'll have to take over the London office, and we will both need you to take charge here in the Far East."

At a corner table, Clarence Goodrich, upon Helen's insistence, was making a belated effort to gain his son's confidence. "I think you are big enough now, son, to have a tutor instead of a governess." Mike's look was suspicious, and Clarence went on hurriedly, "A young chap, you know, not an old fogey. Someone you can play cricket with, and rugby." So that was what his mother and father had been discussing behind closed doors this afternoon, Mike thought cynically. Helen beamed down on him. "You'll like that, won't you, dear? Then you won't have to go away to school for two more years!"

"I wouldn't mind school," Mike blurted. "I'd have

some regular chaps to play with then. I'm sick of being treated like a baby."

His mother winced. "I'm sorry, dear, I didn't realize what a big boy you've grown to be. I know you haven't had anyone to play with since the little American boy went home, but there are lots of nice boys in Singapore, you know, and we'll plan to have them out to the plantation for week-ends."

Mike looked unconvinced. "A lot of molly-coddles," he snorted. "I know all about them. Dave used to have to play with them when their mothers came to tea."

Helen and Clarence exchanged a helpless look over Mike's sleekly brushed head. The silence was broken by his suddenly blurting, "I'd rather have a pony." His father grinned as though he felt a sudden kinship to the youngster. "By Jove, son, you're right. You ought to have had a pony before this. I never thought of it. We'll get you one just as soon as we go back to Singapore." Mike, who had been fearful of voicing his heart's desire, looked up quickly as though unable to believe his ears. "Will you let me go with you and pick him out? Abrams' have just the one I want." His father hesitated, and then unable to resist the eager appeal in the freckled face, nodded his head. "Of course, we'll go together." Mike's freshly-polished shoes happily kicked the table leg. Helen's face was radiant as she silently watched her husband and her son.

"Are you feeling better, Kit?" Dick Stevenson was asking as he passed the cream pitcher to Madge. She made a pretty picture sitting across from him in her

yellow-flowered dress, against the background of green vines, that seemed to make a golden halo of her hair.

"Oh yes, much better. It was just the heat, I think, dear. As soon as the breeze came up, it seemed to blow my headache right away."

"I hope the climate of Singapore isn't going to be too much for you." Dick's voice was solicitous. "Having you here has spoiled me for bachelor digs." Madge touched his hand with her brightly-polished finger-tips. "I'm going to love it. It will be such fun having our own house. I've thought of just the kind of curtains I want for the living room; that sunproof stuff in a soft green. It will look cool, don't you think? And it is so thin that it won't keep out the air."

Ismael's face wore a puzzled frown. All that chatter, and not a word from any of them about the murders. It seemed as though the danger had drawn each family closer together, like a nation forgetting its internal troubles in order to present a solid front to an outside enemy.

Campbell completed the notes he had been making, and pushed aside the battered little book. "The Singapore police gave me a line on several things that are worth looking into," he announced with a satisfied gleam in his grey eyes. "Our friend Stevenson, for instance! He said he had been on several parties with Miss Lowell. I find he went on three. The first two were a bit noisy, but harmless. After the last party, though, he took Miss Lowell home to his bungalow with him. His kabun¹ saw her leaving the next morning.

¹ Gardener.

Not a nice situation for him to run into her up here when he's on his honeymoon. If the Lowell woman dropped even a hint to that jealous bride of his, his marriage would have been on the rocks."

Campbell took a sip of the tea that had cooled, unheeded, in his cup. "Then I find that Gerry Townsend, although he has only been in Malaya a short time, went on at least four grand binges. When he has had a certain amount to drink, he's a nasty customer, and though ordinarily he doesn't pay much attention to women, on each of those occasions he got into difficulties through making overtures to some perfectly respectable woman. Apparently his forgetfulness isn't faked,—his mind is always a blank after a drinking bout. It is quite possible that he might have killed the Lowell woman when she repulsed him, we haven't yet been able to find out what time he saw her, you know. Later he could have killed Miss Page before he started again."

Ismael said nothing, but his brown face was thoughtful as he stirred his tea. Irritated by the lack of response, Campbell continued, "Goodrich is notorious for his affairs with women. Can't seem to let them alone. Mrs. Goodrich puts up a good front, no matter how virulent the gossip becomes, and she seems to be an enigma. None of her friends can figure out whether she knows about his weakness and overlooks it because she still loves him, or whether she is playing the game for the sake of the youngster. For a long time people sympathized with her, but her imperturbability has alienated most of her

friends, and they have begun to drop her. Goodrich himself seems to be well liked. He is popular with his servants and labourers, and at the clubs, though because of his affairs he has been scratched off a lot of social lists."

Campbell paused to pour himself another cup of tea. "John Townsend seems to be a dark horse. In spite of the fact that he has lived in Singapore for so many years, he keeps to himself, and no one except a few close friends knows much about him. He plays a good game of bridge and golf, is an excellent shot and spends all his holidays off in the jungle. He avoids social affairs of all kinds, and though a lot of mothers with marriageable daughters have angled for him, the only woman in whom he has ever shown any interest is Mrs. Goodrich. They were children together, and gossip has it that he expected to marry her, but that when he was in a hospital in France, Goodrich came to England on leave, met Mrs. Goodrich, and married her a year later. Two years after the Goodriches came out here to Singapore, Townsend came trailing out, ostensibly to take charge of his father's Eastern office, but actually,—I am still quoting gossip—to keep an eye on Helen Goodrich in case she needed him. From all reports his devotion hasn't got him anywhere with her and, strangely enough, he seems contented with the arrangement. He may have recovered from his youthful infatuation, or he may just be biding his time until Mrs. Goodrich reaches the end of her rope and decides to ditch her husband. However, I shouldn't think he'd have much hope left

now, after the way Mrs. Goodrich turned on him this morning and tossed him to the dogs—meaning us!”

“Did you discover how Mem Goodrich knew that Tuan Townsend saw Mem Lowell at eight o’clock last night?” Ismael asked.

“Yes, I talked to her later in the morning. She seemed a bit ashamed of herself and evasive. All she told me was that Townsend himself had told her he had been at the bungalow to interview Miss Lowell. Townsend refuses to discuss the matter. I tackled him from several angles and got nowhere. I can’t figure out his connection with the Lowell woman, unless he was trying to get his brother out of some scrape.”

“Considering his character, and his devotion to Mrs. Goodrich,” Ismael said thoughtfully, “I think rather that he was acting on Mrs. Goodrich’s behalf: that he went down to the bungalow to try and persuade Mem Lowell to leave the hill, perhaps to offer her a bribe. If he had been trying to help his brother out of some difficulty he would never have mentioned it to anyone, not even to his best friend.”

“I think you are right,” Campbell admitted. “I hadn’t thought of it in that light. That would fit in nicely with a case against Goodrich, showing the desperate straits in which he was: that he called in a family friend to intercede and, when the friend failed, his only alternative to ruin and disgrace was to kill the woman.” He paused to consider briefly the facts he had assembled against the planter, and then

added disconsolately, "The trouble is that I have just about as good a case against Blake, the American boy, the two Townsend brothers, and, if I can break down Stevenson's alibi that he was with his wife, against him too. It isn't a case I want, Ismael, but the murderer."

Ismael nodded his understanding. "It is still too soon. The murderer is on his guard now. We must wait until he betrays himself. You haven't yet had a reply to your cables?"

"No, I'll be lucky if I hear from them before Monday. Did you find out anything to-day?"

The little Malay shook his head. "Nothing definite, tuan. I have talked at length with each of the guests, but I received no new information, only a few impressions of the people themselves."

Remembering Ismael's statement that he was going out to get acquainted with the murderer, Campbell looked interested. "What did you think of them?"

Ismael smiled. "I think that Tuan Gerry Townsend is very much ashamed of himself; that Tuan John Townsend has discovered the clay feet of his idol, Mem Goodrich; that Mem Goodrich loves her husband beyond all else in the world and will sacrifice everyone and everything to protect him even from his own foolishness. I think Tuan Goodrich is very worried over the situation in which he finds himself, and for the first time in many years realizes how much he cares for his wife and child. I think the little English girl is interested in the American boy, but is too fearful of her mother to do anything about it. And I

think the American mem is much attracted to Tuan John Townsend, although as yet he does not guess it, and perhaps she herself doesn't fully know. I don't know what to think of Tuan Pennington. Away from his wife, he is like a raging lion who has triumphed over everyone, strong, clever and able; but with her, he is but a sick kitten. She never lets him forget that he was once a poor, ignorant boy, and that her father was a nobleman. Which of all these people is the murderer, I do not yet know. The trouble with your race is that you do not act naturally. You hide your feeling in shame, and one must seek far below the surface to find the good and bad that is in you."

The shadows had lengthened across the veranda, and below, in the distance, the Straits of Malacca was a sea of molten gold on which the tiny green islands stood out like black bubbles. As the blood-red sun, with a lingering, malevolent survey, sank below the horizon, the breeze took on a sharper chill. Madge Stevenson shivered.

"I'll get a wrap for you, Kit, and then we'll take a brisk walk before dinner," Dick said, pushing back his chair. "Wait for me inside."

Lady Emily, marshalling her family together, swept past the scattered tables without a glance at the occupants.

From under her long lashes, Carol watched John Townsend as he spoke to Gerry, and then rose stiffly from his table. Helen Goodrich turned, and as John limped past her table, put out an impulsive hand. "If he stops and speaks to her," Carol thought fiercely,

"I'll never have any use for him again." Her lips twisted into a grimace. "Perhaps it would be better for me that way." But John, with a grave bow, passed on, with Gerry sauntering behind him. At Carol's table he halted upon an impulse strange to him—nice youngsters, these Americans,—the sort of people Gerry ought to know. Carol looked up and smiled, almost as though she guessed his thoughts. "Good afternoon, Miss Courtney. I wonder if you know my brother Gerry."

Bob glared at the intruders, his face darkening as Gerry stepped forward. Carol's smile creeping from her eyes to her sensitive lips, was demure, but under the table her slim red heels jabbed viciously at Bob's ankles. Reluctantly he rose and stretched out his hand as Carol murmured the introductions. She didn't even spare him a glance of approval, Bob noticed resentfully, though she knew damn well what he thought of fellows that couldn't carry their liquor, and made asses of themselves. Under Carol's soothing banter, John Townsend seemed to relax. Bob hesitated. Was it just the afterglow on Kay's face that made it light up that way, or was it the English chap? He never had seen her look that way before. Gerry was standing uncertainly, like a gawky puppy who hoped for a pat, but feared a licking. "How about a game of billiards, Townsend?" Bob heard himself asking. The gratitude that leaped into the English lad's face belied the nonchalance of his acceptance. Kay felt a fresh surge of affection for her brother. She knew the meeting

had gone against the grain, and for a moment she had feared that Bob might let her down, but she hadn't been able to resist the silent appeal in John Townsend's manner. As the two boys went off together toward the billiard-room, John looked more nearly happy than she had ever seen him.

"Let's take a walk," Carol proposed. "I have sat in this chair so long that I feel as though I were part of the rattan it was made of. I can't get used to the shortness of the twilights here," she said, as they moved across the veranda. "It will be pitch dark in another ten minutes."

Helen Goodrich sighed. She had Clarence to herself again, and for the first time in many years, there was understanding between him and the boy, but she felt a strange emptiness as the slim American girl and the tall Englishman vanished down the steps into the shadow of the path. She heard his laughter ring out suddenly and, with a pang, she realized that she hadn't heard John laugh so spontaneously for years—not since before she was married. "I must go up and see that the nurse has everything she needs. I promised to step in and see how Miss Hancock was after I'd had tea," she said automatically to her husband, and then to her son, "You'd better go and wash your face, dear. It is all smeared with strawberry jam."

As the Chinese waiters began trooping back and forth through the dining-hall in their business of clearing the tea tables on the rear veranda, Campbell picked up his notebook. "Let's go into the office, Ismael.

It is almost too dark to see in here, and I have an idea that if we make a time schedule from these notes, we can tell pretty well where everyone was supposed to be at the time of the murders. We may find some illuminating discrepancies if we work things out." Ismael didn't look enthusiastic, but he made no objection as he followed his chief across the dining-hall, and into the little office.

For half an hour, nothing was heard but the low murmur of their voices and the occasional clatter of silverware and china in the dining-room outside where the Chinese boys were at their eternal task of clothing and garnishing the tables. Suddenly, without ceremony, the office door burst open. With an annoyed expression, Campbell glanced up from the papers which littered the manager's desk. "What is it?"

Dick Stevenson, his hair ruffled, his face ghastly, stood on the threshold. "Madge," he gasped. "Have you seen her? She was to wait for me while I got a scarf. When I came down she was nowhere around. I have looked high and low. She's not in the hotel, and I couldn't find her along any of the paths."

Campbell and Ismael jumped to their feet. The fear in Stevenson's face was reflected in theirs. "Don't get the wind up, old man," Campbell said. "She's probably around somewhere. I'll send out the Chinese boys to locate her." His voice sounded strained and unnatural. Ismael looked stricken. "Another!" he whispered under his breath. "Allah forgive me, for I cannot forgive myself."

CHAPTER XIII

As the night closed down with tropic swiftness, lights blazed from every room in the hotel. The huge rectangle of yellow on the hill-top was repeated in smaller oblongs of flame where the four bungalows squatted among their gloomy surroundings. Electric torches gleamed like fireflies along the winding paths, and danced among the trees on the wooded slopes. Every available vehicle of light had been pressed into service in this war against darkness; flashlights, lanterns, lamps and flares. Every available man, white, yellow, and brown had been organized for the search, but their tiny, inadequate lights fought vainly to penetrate the black, menacing wall of the jungle. A contingent of wiry little Malay constables from Penang, answering Campbell's telephoned summons, arrived to supplement the army of amateur searchers, and set about their task with bland efficiency, reporting to Ismael, at regular intervals, their lack of success.

Campbell's face was a furrowed mask that repelled the fear-full questions of the four women who had been corralled, against their will, in the dining-hall. Lady Emily, offended by his brusque replies to her inquiries, was knitting her indignation into a drab shawl for one of her unfortunate protégés. Helen Goodrich moved restlessly between the sleeping

patient upstairs and her excited son, who refused to move from his station beside the front door. Carol, pale and shaken by this latest disaster, had found a limp, soiled pack of cards and was mechanically playing Canfield. Diane moved cautiously away from her mother's side, and encouraged by the latter's abstraction, had come to perch bird-like on Carol's chair arm.

Outside, Ismael worked indefatigably among the searchers, urging on the weary Chinamen, suggesting new fields for the Malay policemen to investigate, encouraging the worried white men. As the hours wore on, his eyes glowed like charcoals and his haggard brown face paled to the colour of putty. In spite of his cheerful words, he had long since given up any faint hope that the little yellow-haired bride would be found alive. If she had fallen over the cliff, their shouts, had she been conscious, would have reached her, their lights have picked out her body. Despair and anger shook him at the realization that the murderer must be rejoicing in their futile efforts, perhaps even subtly misdirecting the search. Dick Stevenson, on the verge of collapse, repulsed all well-meant efforts to quiet him, and wandered aimlessly back and forth along the paths calling "Kit!" in a voice that at last had dwindled to a mere hoarse whisper.

Reluctantly Ismael returned to the hotel where Campbell and two Chinese boys had completed a futile but microscopic search of every room, closet, chest, trunk and outbuilding.

“Not a sign of her, Ismael!” The officer seemed to have aged ten years in the last three hours. “If I could get my hands on the fiend who did this——” His bony fingers closed suggestively. The Malay nodded in sympathy. “It is no use, I fear, to search further in the dark. I have told the Chinese to come in. The cooks must make coffee and sandwiches for the men, otherwise they may collapse under the strain.”

Campbell pushed a weary hand through his sandy hair. “You’re right. No one has thought of food, but I suppose we all ought to have something if we are to keep on going. Tell the police to continue the search, but have the guests come in. The women are holding up well. I’ve been afraid we might have trouble with them.”

Ismael’s face was sober as he said, “The one we would have had difficulty with, is gone, tuan. Almost it seems as though her tears were in anticipation of what was awaiting her.”

Campbell’s shoulders sagged even more. “I know. I blame myself for this. Somehow we should have protected her.”

Ismael shook his head. “At first I, too, thought that way, but we could have done nothing. Our fate is the will of Allah. Hers was to die. All we may hope is that our destiny is to avenge her murder.”

“You feel so sure then that she is dead?”

“Tentu!”¹ His voice was emphatic. “From the first I have felt that in my heart, as you have, tuan, despite your brave words.”

¹ Certainly.

"I'm going to check up on the other women," Campbell said abruptly. "They aren't going to be out of our sight from now on. I'll hate to leave them alone even with their husbands or brothers after this."

In response to Ismael's summons, the white men reluctantly left the search to the Malay constables and returned to the hotel. Their white suits were torn and mudstained, their fingers bleeding from thorns, and their faces swollen with insect bites. Dick Stevenson alone refused to leave his weary task. "Leave me alone, Ismael! For God's sake how can I eat or rest when Madge may be lying out in the dark somewhere waiting for me to find her?" His voice broke. "She was so afraid of the dark, too." With renewed desperation he took up his cry, "Kit! Kit! Where are you, dear? I'm coming!"

Ismael let him go. He would keep on until he dropped from exhaustion and had to be carried to his bed, but better that than the agony of consciousness. Doc Turner would be here soon to administer peace-giving drugs to those who needed them. The little Malay trotted back alone to the hotel. He, too, felt that he had no right to eat or rest until the girl was found. The odour of fresh coffee from the kitchens suddenly nauseated him and, unable to face the sight of food, he squatted on the veranda steps. Four hours ago, Tuan Stevenson had gone up to their rooms to fetch a scarf for his mem. He had spent some time there looking for the article, he said, but he could not have been away from his bride more than ten

to fifteen minutes at the outside. She was to meet him in the dining-hall. Suppose, Ismael thought, instead of going inside, she had decided to wait for him on the veranda, or to stroll along a path, she certainly could not have gone far. He turned a speculative eye on the porch. The lights from the windows and doors streamed out illuminating even the farthest chairs and tables, but at tea-time, four hours ago, the lights had not yet been lit. There must have been shadowy corners, and the whole three sides of the veranda must have been grey with a brief dusk.

The little brown man rose stiffly to his feet and went to the door, acting out a scene that he suddenly visualized. So perhaps she had come, so for a moment she might have stood in the doorway—that moment when the murderer saw her. Ismael hesitated, and then moved slowly to the far end of the wide front porch, where the bougainvillaea and mimosa vines clambered up the lattice work that closed in the veranda foundations and sprawled in scented profusion over the railing. With an exclamation he whisked on his flashlight. The flowers and leaves were crushed and bruised. Petals sprinkled the floor. With a half-fearful glance at the doors to be sure that he was not observed, he tiptoed off the veranda, and hurried along the front of the hotel to the far end, his torch picking out the torn and tangled vines which had been roughly pulled back into place. How could it have escaped them all! The darkness of course was to blame—in the daylight it could never have been overlooked.

With trembling fingers, Ismael gently lowered the vines which had been so hastily stuffed back against the lattice-work. They fell to the ground like a lacy curtain of white and purple, spreading their soft petals on the flaxen hair and filmy dress of the girl who lay so motionless behind them. She lay face downward, and as the little Malay stooped over her, he saw the ugly brown stain that sprawled among the gay yellow-printed flowers of her dress. Just below her shoulder blade, where the stain began, there was a narrow slit, where the knife had entered. Standing by the rail above, she probably never even saw the face of the murderer as he had silently crept up behind her. One swift, sure blow, and she would have crumpled over the railing, then a heave, and she was on the ground below. Ismael pictured the murderer strolling nonchalantly past the open doors and down the steps, hurrying to the end of the veranda, pulling aside the vines, shoving her body behind them, then stuffing them back into place against the lattice. Another quick trip to the veranda above to catch the vines from the top and yank them over the railing. There might be a few drops of blood up there, but that was all—that, and the tell-tale petals on the floor. What better hiding-place could the murderer have found, and what more appropriate shroud for the little bride!

With dragging feet, Ismael mounted the steps. In the distance he could hear Dick Stevenson's hoarse voice calling at intervals for the girl who would never

answer. Pinpoints of light quivering through the night showed where the Malay police were continuing their hopeless search. Campbell stood in the doorway, and his eyes narrowed with dread as the light from the dining-hall revealed the seamed, ashen face of his assistant. With a backward glance at the forlorn group of guests sitting around the tables inside, he moved swiftly across the veranda toward Ismael, whispering, "Where?" Without replying, the Malay turned and led the way. Silently he pointed to the body in its fragrant nest of leaves and flowers.

"God!" the white man breathed, and then, after a moment, he asked practically, "How was it done?"

"A slim knife, I think, tuan, or a dagger. The slit in her dress is small, just below the shoulder blade. You can see the stains."

Campbell stooped over the body for a moment, careful, as Ismael had been, not to disturb any footprints that might be there, and then straightening up, exclaimed in a voice that was almost a wail, "But why, Ismael? This murder doesn't fit in anywhere. I don't see any reason for it unless it was sheer blood-lust."

The Malay shook his head. "There is cold calculation behind each of these murders, tuan. Of that I am sure. But what it is, Allah alone knows!"

"But listen, Ismael. Here are three women murdered, all by different means, within twenty-four hours. We figured that the second murder, that of Miss Page, was a logical outcome of the first. But how

can you account for this one? Mrs. Stevenson was in the hotel at the time of both murders. She didn't know either Miss Page or Miss Lowell. In fact she knew none of the guests at all except John Townsend, who met her once or twice in Singapore at the time of her wedding. Here is a girl who lived in England, has only been in Malaya a month, and is killed up here on her honeymoon. She had no points of contact at all with the murderer, and he could have had no reason for wishing her out of the way, unless, by Jove! it was her husband!"

As though in answer to the accusation, they heard the hoarse weary voice of Dick Stevenson calling from a point close at hand. "If he killed her, all I can say is that he missed his vocation," Campbell muttered. "He'd be the world's greatest actor." The officer turned wearily away. "I suppose I've got to break the news to the poor chap, though how I'm going to do it, I don't know. Better pull those vines over the body and station one of the policemen on guard until Doc Turner gets here. I don't want those people inside to know she's been found until I'm ready to question them."

Half an hour later, when Campbell entered the dining-room, the guests were still seated around their empty coffee cups, the men wearily awaiting his summons to resume the search. It seemed incredible to the officer that they were all in ignorance of the happenings of the last half hour. He flinched from the memory of the agony in Dick Stevenson's eyes

as he had half led, half carried him up to his room ; and the sound of his muffled, heart-rending sobs that had only been stilled by the sedative which Dr. Turner had administered. Then there had been the doctor's examination of the murdered woman, an examination which added nothing to their knowledge: she had been killed instantly by a small dagger, or a slim knife, plunged with terrific force into her back. The body had been carried upstairs by two little Malay constables, and then he and Ismael had searched vainly for the weapon, for footprints, for any clue that might cast some light on this third tragedy. They had worked so quietly and efficiently that to the best of Campbell's knowledge neither servants nor guests knew that Mrs. Stevenson had been found, and none, save the murderer and her husband, knew that she had been killed.

"Which is he!" Campbell wondered as he glanced about the room. Gerry Townsend and Bob Courtney, their young faces haggard with the evening's activities, were talking together in low tones, while across from them Carol Courtney was sitting silently beside John Townsend. Incongruously enough, George Blake was leaning over the back of Henry Pennington's chair, oblivious both to Lady Emily's frozen annoyance and Diane's amusement, while he expounded to the bored manufacturer his theory of the crimes. Helen Goodrich, white and worn, was urging her son to finish his sandwiches and get to bed, while he, with a wary eye on the slowly diminishing pile, was stalling for time.

Clarence Goodrich sat in morose silence, answering Helen's efforts to rouse him in reluctant monosyllables.

"I have news for you, ladies and gentlemen," Campbell announced moving close to the three occupied tables. He put his hand up to silence the eager babble of questions, and Carol, noticing the granite hardness of the officer's face, braced herself to receive the news. "Mrs. Stevenson has been found—not a hundred feet from where you are sitting." With intentional brutality he continued, "She was murdered on the front veranda and her body hidden behind the vines."

A gasp of dismay stirred through the room, and every face expressed the proper amount of horror. It had been foolish of him to try a stunt like that, Campbell thought. The murderer he was seeking was far too clever to give himself away.

"It is obvious," the officer went on, "that Mrs. Stevenson was killed while her husband was upstairs getting a wrap for her—a matter of not more than fifteen minutes, or less than ten. I understand that he had some difficulty in locating the garment. Do any of you remember Mrs. Stevenson's leaving the tea-table?"

"I do," Carol said in a small voice. "She passed our table and went along the side veranda just ahead of her husband."

"Did you see where she went?"

Carol shook her head. "No, Mr. Townsend and his brother stopped to talk to us just then."

"Did anyone else notice Mrs. Stevenson?" Campbell asked.

"I did." This time it was Diane, who, ignoring her mother's gesture for silence, addressed the officer in a firm little voice. "She was just ahead of us. I remember thinking what a pretty dress she had on. It was yellow and green, and she made me think of the jonquils in our garden at home. She went in the side door."

"Thank you, Miss Pennington. If Mrs. Stevenson entered the dining-hall from the side door, she must have crossed the room, and gone out the front door. Did anyone see her in the dining-hall, or on the front veranda?"

Gerry Townsend started. "If she had on a yellow dress, I dimly remember seeing a woman in yellow go out of the front door as Courtney and I crossed the dining-hall on our way to the billiard-room."

"Did you see her, Courtney?"

"No, Townsend was ahead of me. I wasn't paying much attention to anything, I'm afraid."

"All right. We have traced her now to the veranda. Can any of you remember seeing her there? You were all leaving the tea-tables about that time, and those of you who went down the front steps must have done so while she was on the porch, while she was being killed, or directly afterwards while the murderer was concealing the body."

A shiver crawled over the guests. His words made a picture too appalling to think about.

"For God's sake, why didn't she cry out!" Bob exclaimed in a voice that was almost a moan.

"She didn't have time. She was stabbed from behind!" The officer's tone was as grim as his face.

"It's horrible, horrible," Pennington muttered. "With all of us around her!" He wiped the cold perspiration from his forehead. "I was on the steps myself for two or three minutes talking to my wife. She decided she couldn't face a cold bath, and sent me off to find our boy and order hot water." He frowned as he recalled the scene. "I don't understand why I didn't see Mrs. Stevenson."

"It was quite dark by that time, Henry," Lady Emily reminded him in her clipped phrases. "We had sat so long over tea that I was thoroughly chilled. The lazy servants hadn't turned on the lights anywhere, either, and I nearly stumbled going down the steps."

Campbell shifted restlessly, and then realizing suddenly how tired he was, pulled out a vacant chair from a nearby table and seated himself astride it. "All right. I understand then that no one admits seeing Mrs. Stevenson after she went out the front door. Now I want to know what each of you did from the time you left the tea-tables, whom you were with, where you went." He looked at Bob Courtney and Gerry Townsend who were seated on his extreme right. "We'll begin with you, Mr. Courtney."

Bob swallowed hard. "I had tea with my sister and then went into the billiard-room with Townsend. We were there about half an hour,—in fact until we heard the commotion about Mrs. Stevenson."

"You were together all that time?"

The American flushed. "Practically. Townsend went out to get some cigarettes, but he wasn't gone long."

The officer frowned. "That means that you were alone in the billiard-room and he was off somewhere."

Gerry spoke up. "That's right. My hand was a bit shaky and I thought a fag might steady me. I went to the bar, but the boy wasn't there, and I had to hunt one up before I could get a tin."

Campbell glanced at Ismael who had entered the room silently and taken a stand behind his superior officer. Ismael nodded, and leaning down whispered, "I have talked with the servants. The bar boy spilled something on his coat and went to his quarters to change it, thinking no one would require his services at that time. One of the waiters heard Tuan Townsend call, and got a tin of cigarettes for him."

"How long were you away from the billiard-room?" Campbell asked, turning again to the young Englishman.

"I don't know. Not very long."

"Was Mr. Courtney there when you returned?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Courtney, how long were you alone?"

"I don't know exactly. Five or ten minutes."

With an impatient shrug, the officer addressed Pennington.

"What did you do after tea, Mr. Pennington?"

The manufacturer cleared his throat. "I told you

I went as far as the steps with my wife and daughter, and then at her request hunted up our room boy to order some hot water."

Again Ismael nodded. "That checks, tuan. The boys were having some tea in their quarters. One of the waiters went for Tuan Pennington's room boy. The tuan wished to give orders to him direct."

"What did you do after you spoke to the boy, Mr. Pennington?"

"I decided I'd take a stroll and finish my cigar before going into our bungalow. My wife doesn't like to have heavy cigar-smoke in our bedroom, and even when I smoke in the living-room, it is apt to penetrate into the sleeping quarters: So, instead of stopping at the bungalow, I walked beyond it, and made a circuit of the hill."

"What did you do, Lady Emily, after your husband left you?"

The English woman drew herself up haughtily. "My daughter and I went directly to our bungalow where we remained until we were requested to come to the hotel."

"You confirm that statement, Miss Pennington?"

Diane bowed. "Yes."

"Mr. Blake." Campbell shifted his position slightly in order to face the salesman. "What did you do after tea?"

"I stopped at the bar, but the boy was away. I decided I'd stroll around a bit until he came back."

"Where did you go?"

"Down the path a way."

"Which path, and how far did you go?"

"The one that leads toward the bungalows. I was trying to plan my itinerary, and wasn't thinking much where I was going until I came face to face with the house where Katherine was killed. It was a shock and I hurried away as fast as I could. The bar boy was back when I got to the hotel, and I had a drink. You came out of the office just then with Stevenson, and I heard what was up."

"Did you meet Mr. Pennington on you walk?"

"No. I saw his wife and daughter ahead of me. They turned in at their bungalow."

"Mr. Pennington, did you see Mr. Blake? You both walked in the same direction?"

"No, I saw nobody," the manufacturer said. "He must have started out ahead of me, if, as he says, he was just behind my wife and daughter. Did you come back along the same path, Blake?" he asked the salesman.

"Yes. I turned right back when I reached the fourth bungalow," Blake looked worried. "It's funny I didn't meet you."

Pennington smiled, "No it isn't. I went down the side steps. Thought I'd try that short cut I'd heard about. You were probably on the main path while I was going through the shrubbery."

The salesman gave an audible sigh of relief. "That must have been it. I thought for a moment you were all making me out a liar."

Campbell gave him a thoughtful look, but instead of addressing him further, turned to John Townsend.

"And you, Mr. Townsend?"

"After tea I went for a little walk with Miss Courtney. We went as far as the railroad station, and then back.

"You were together all the time?"

Carol flushed, and then her face grew white. "Oh dear," she murmured under her breath.

"Not quite," John admitted. "Miss Courtney discovered that she had dropped her handkerchief, and I went back to look for it."

"It was one I got in Paris to match my dress," Carol explained. "And I was afraid it would blow away. I wish to heaven I'd let it!"

"Did you find the handkerchief?" Campbell asked.

"Yes, it was caught in the wicker chair in which Miss Courtney had been sitting."

"How long did it take you?"

"Not very long. It was quite dark on the veranda, and the chairs and tables had been pushed about so that it took me a few minutes to find the thing. The dining-room was still dark, and I had to light matches."

"Not a man yet with an alibi," the officer murmured to his assistant.

"How about you, Mr. Goodrich?" Campbell shifted further in his chair to address the rubber planter who was on his extreme left.

"I stayed on at the tea-table after my wife and son left. I had nothing special to do, and it was cool and quiet out there. The waiters cleared the tables and

pushed back the chairs, and I took one at the far end of the veranda. I saw Townsend come back and hunt for something. I was going to offer to help him, but just then he seemed to find whatever it was, so I didn't speak."

"Did you see Mr. Goodrich, Mr. Townsend?" the officer's voice had a sharp edge.

"I'm afraid I didn't," John said reluctantly. "I was intent on finding the handkerchief and getting back to Miss Courtney as soon as possible. I didn't like the idea of her being alone out there."

Carol flashed him a grateful look.

All of Campbell's suspicions of the planter were evident in the tone of his next question. "How long were you alone on the veranda, Mr. Goodrich?"

"From tea-time until I heard the commotion inside, and through the lighted windows saw that something was amiss. I went in then."

"Did any of the waiters say they had seen Mr. Goodrich on the rear veranda, Ismael?" Campbell asked in a lowered voice.

"Yes, tuan, several of them mentioned him, and one boy said he had moved a chair for the tuan."

The officer sighed. The investigation was getting nowhere.

"Mrs. Goodrich, where were you after tea?"

Helen twisted her handkerchief with thin nervous fingers. "I went up to see how Miss Hancock was. She is still unable to talk, but she looks a little brighter. I stayed and chatted with the nurse while she had her tea. Then I went in to see whether my son had washed

properly. He had washed his face, but not his neck or knees." She smiled faintly at the recollection of the argument her criticism had aroused. "That too consumed some time. When I came downstairs, my husband had started to look for me. He told me that Mrs. Stevenson was missing."

Once more the officer's keen gaze wandered slowly around the group as though it were about to unmask the murderer by sheer force of penetration. Every eye was fixed expectantly upon him, but not a glance wavered, not a hand or lip betrayed itself. Contrary to the usual police customs, he had decided to question the guests publicly hoping that any discrepancy in the murderer's story might call forth enlightening comment on the part of one of the others. The possible success of the ruse in his opinion outweighed the disadvantages. As he rose from his chair, he admitted to himself that he was completely baffled, but there was no indication of his disappointment in his manner as he said quietly, "The arrangements for to-night will be different in one respect from those of last night. All of you guests will be housed upstairs, and a Malay constable will be stationed outside each door."

Lady Emily stood up majestically. "No policeman is going to dictate to me. I've stood enough of this nonsense. Where is the telephone? I am going to have that man removed." She pointed an enraged finger at the officer.

Campbell stared at her imperturbably. "Madam, I am responsible for your safety. You may telephone

the Inspector General, or the Governor of the Colony, but I shall still do my best to see that you aren't murdered in your bed to-night."

Lady Emily's finger wavered, but her voice was strident as she said, "You should have caught the murderer before Mrs. Stevenson was killed. All this parade of authority means nothing except that you are trying to conceal your inefficiency. This sort of thing could never have happened in England."

"Emily!" Her husband's voice was like the crack of a whip. "Don't be a fool. The man is doing his best. It is up to us to co-operate with him." Her small eyes shifted in surprise to Pennington's, met his intent, serious stare, and then without a word beckoned imperiously to her daughter. Turning her heavy, high-corseted figure, she gathered her long skirt up deliberately as though to avoid contact, as she swept by the officer."

"I'm sorry, sir," Pennington apologized, "Lady Emily isn't well, and it is difficult for her to adapt herself to circumstances so unusual. I am sure that you can count on her, as on the rest of us, to carry out any orders you think wise." He bowed stiffly, and followed his wife and daughter from the room.

"Well, that's that." Campbell sighed as the other guests scattered for the stairs. "I'll circulate around the front of the hotel, and you can keep your eyes peeled at the sides and back. I hardly think the murderer will strike again to-night, but I'm not going to take any more chances until we have him under lock and key."

CHAPTER XIV

THE long night drew to a close, and the new day was born with all the gorgeous pomp and pageantry of a tropical sunrise. Oblivious of its beauty, Campbell, sprawled in a long wicker chair, was summing up the events of the previous two nights, while Ismael squatting on his heels put in an occasional word. "At any rate," the officer concluded, "We have come through this night without any more casualties. I've just checked up with the constables and everyone is still safe in his room."

No sooner had he finished his statement, than there was the sound of a struggle and loud voices just inside the door. With a muttered oath, Campbell sprang to his feet just as Mike, very red of face, and dishevelled as to clothes, wriggled out of the clutch of a Malay policeman and stumbled out on to the veranda.

"What's all this about?" Campbell demanded, glancing from the small boy to the disconcerted constable.

"Please, tuan. I couldn't hold him. He is like an ular."¹ the little Malay complained. "I was faithfully guarding the door of Mem Goodrich's room when I saw it slowly opening. I stepped forward, and the anak rushed at me like a goat." He pointed suggestively to the rotund spot which Mike had butted.

¹ Snake.

"Down the stairs he ran so swiftly that I only caught him at the door."

Concealing his amusement, Campbell nodded a dismissal to the constable and turned his attention to Mike. "What do you mean by disobeying orders and assaulting an officer in the discharge of his duties?"

Mike swallowed hard. "I had something to tell you, and that babi¹ wouldn't let me. You told me to watch Semut, and then you never gave me a chance to report." He sounded aggrieved.

"All right, let's have it," Campbell said, settling back again in his chair.

Mike perched on the railing, having first explored his pockets for a grimy, half-chewed stick of candy. "I couldn't find Semut when I first went to look for him. He'd gone down to Penang to see his cousin, and he didn't get back until just before tea-time. What he told you yesterday was true. He was up in the kitchen waiting to see his cousin when that first woman was killed, and he didn't know anything about it. His cousin didn't come up here on account of the storm, so pretty soon Semut went back to our bungalow. Then when my father went down to get Miss Hancock, and found her knocked out on the floor, Semut got scared to stay alone, and got permission to sleep up at the hotel with the other boys. He's very worried now on account of my father. He is afraid you are going to arrest him—my father, I mean, not Semut."

Mike bit off another piece of candy before expatiating.

¹Pig.

"Semut isn't like most boys, always changing tuans. He wouldn't work for anyone but father. You see, my father saved his life once. One of the coolies on the plantation ran amok. He killed seven other coolies with his parang, and then ran up to the house. It was really Semut he was after all the time. The other coolies just happened to get in his way. He thought Semut had stolen his wife. Semut didn't want her, but she was always hanging around him, and she wouldn't live with her own husband any more. So the husband ran amok. Well, Semut heard the yells outside, and went out to see what the trouble was, and there was the coolie coming right at him with his parang all bloody." Mike paused dramatically. "Semut was too frightened to move, and he thought Allah had willed him to die. Just then, bang went a gun, and the coolie toppled over dead. It was my father who had shot him. So then Semut knew that Allah wanted him to live and work for my father. That's why he is different from most boys."

Campbell's attention had wandered during Mike's recital, but Ismael was still regarding the small, balancing figure with grave eyes. "Why did Semut wish to see his cousin yesterday?" he inquired.

"Oh, that was to save my father." Mike swung his legs contentedly as he took another bite. "His uncle is the pawang of one of the kampongs near here, and he is very clever. He knows everything. Semut told him about the women getting killed up here, and asked him who did it. The pawang said if Semut

would bring a hair from the head of each of the dead mems, he would tell him to-night. Semut got a hair from Miss Lowell's head, and Miss Page's before the bodies were sent down to Penang, and I guess he has one now from Mrs. Stevenson. The pawang told him to bring the weapon, too, that killed them, but Semut said he couldn't get it because Ismael had sent it away—that was the strap, of course, and he didn't know what had killed the other mem, but he thought it might have been a big stone. The pawang said if he couldn't find the right stone, to bring one from a place close by where the body had been."

"Does Semut think your father committed the murders?" Campbell asked.

"He doesn't know." Mike said simply. "But he says that if you think father did it, it is just as bad because you will arrest him and hang him anyway."

Campbell gave a surprised grunt, but Mike went on calmly, "I told him you wouldn't arrest father because I was helping you, and I knew he didn't do it because he was still in the bungalow when I jumped out at the murderer and scared him."

"Budah, who do you think is the evil one who has caused these deaths?" Ismael asked.

Mike's feet paused in their swing and he teetered dangerously. "I don't know. None of them look like a murderer do they? They are all nice men. John Townsend—well, he bowls with me when he comes out to see mother. I call him 'Uncle John.' He couldn't be the one. His brother is a good scout too. He took

me to the circus in Singapore. Carol's brother was teaching me tennis down on the court yesterday morning. Mr. Stevenson took me for a walk—his wife didn't want me along, but Mr. Stevenson said, 'Oh let him come. He's lonesome with no one his own age to play with.' Mr. Blake gave me a whole ringger to put toward my rifle, and Mr. Pennington gave me a jar of candy last night when his wife wasn't around. I don't think it could be any of the men. I think it must be that Lady Emily. She looks like a man, and if she put on men's clothes nobody could tell the difference." He paused suggestively, and then with childish naïveté concluded, "Besides, she would like to cuff my ears—she's always saying so. Anyway I'm watching her!"

Ismael's eyes twinkled. "How do you proceed, budah?"

"Oh, I follow her around wherever she goes, and I sit close where I can hear what she is saying. It makes her angry and her face turns as red as a fighting cock whenever she sees me."

"You have heard nothing suspicious?" the Malay asked with becoming gravity.

Mike shook his head. "No, I listen everywhere, but no one seems to want to talk about the murders. I think they are afraid that they may be speaking to the murderer himself, and he may bump them off. There's our room boy looking for me. Mother must have sent him." Stuffing the remainder of the candy in his mouth, Mike slid from the railing and slipped through the side door as the Chinese boy came padding in search of him.

Ismael spoke to him, and with a murmur of relief, the young Chinaman vanished leaving the two detectives alone once more.

"We don't seem to be getting anywhere, Ismael," Campbell said in a discouraged tone. "We not only have no idea who the murderer is, but we don't know why he has killed these people, or who will be his next victim. It is the killing of Mrs. Stevenson that upsets all our theories. I can't see any possible motive for that, unless she stumbled on a clue, as we know Miss Page did, and I don't see how she could have done that, for apparently she never went anywhere or talked to anyone without her husband." He paused, and then added, "Of course she might have found out that he had been mixed up with the Lowell woman, and had killed her, and then Miss Page. His wife might have threatened to expose him, and he had to murder her to save himself. Somehow though, I can't believe that. If ever a man was broken when I told him about his wife, he was."

Ismael who had been staring thoughtfully at the gold-tipped tops of the trees in the valley agreed with him. "I, too, feel that Tuan Stevenson did not kill his wife. I heard the mem talking to him at tea-time about green curtains she wanted for their bungalow in Singapore. She would not have been planning so calmly for their future had she thought her husband was a murderer. Nor would he have addressed her so affectionately as he did, had he feared her tongue. No, I think the murderer is some-

one who had cause to hate or fear each of the women he killed." The little Malay rose and stretched his short, cramped legs. "I hear sounds of stirring upstairs, tuan. I think I will tell the constables to get their breakfast and then let them search further for the weapon. I could not find it concealed in any of the rooms when I looked last night, and it is possible, though not likely, I think, that the murderer may have tossed it away into some thicket."

A few minutes later Carol Courtney ventured out on to the freshly swabbed veranda, where a small efficient Chinese boy was carefully replacing the wicker chairs and lounges into their exact positions. Her face was haggard from lack of sleep, her eyes still haunted by the horror of the previous two nights as she stared unseeingly at the cool beauty of the tropic morning. At the sound of a voice behind her, she whirled, her slim, tanned hands fluttering to her throat. "Oh, it is you!" Her lips trembled into a smile of welcome at John Townsend. "I have a bad attack of the jitters, I'm afraid."

"I'm sorry I startled you." John's voice was warm with sympathy. "I thought you must have heard me coming along. My shoes seemed to make an unearthly clatter. I feel somehow as though we should all go tiptoeing around, and speak in whispers."

"Mercy! not that," Carol exclaimed. "Let's make a lot of noise and break this ghastly spell. It's over everything, like a pall. Even the birds sound different this morning, and I haven't heard a single monkey jabber."

"What you need is a brisk turn before breakfast," John said matter-of-factly, tucking her hand under his arm. He had an impersonal sense of surprise to find himself taking care of this girl, and her natural acceptance of him undermined the wall of reserve he had so carefully erected around his emotions.

"There is really nothing for you to be afraid of personally," he assured her, choosing a path unassociated with tragedy. "Whoever the murderer is, he would have no reason to harm you."

"That is what I thought after Miss Lowell's murder," Carol admitted. "Then when Miss Page was killed I began to get scared—wondered where it was going to stop, and who would be next. Now that Mrs. Stevenson has been killed, I'm really panicky. I can't imagine why anyone would want to kill such a harmless little person. I can understand how Katherine might have aroused hatred or fear, and Hester's death seemed at first to be a logical outcome of Katherine's murder, but Mrs. Stevenson——. It is that that frightens me." In spite of the sunshine, she shivered.

John looked troubled. "The only explanation is that Mrs. Stevenson stumbled on some sort of clue to the murderer's identity, just as Miss Page did."

Carol shook her head. "I don't see how that was possible. In the first place, Mrs. Stevenson was a typical clinging vine, and in the second place she was terrified—wouldn't even go upstairs alone. If she had discovered anything vital, and I don't see how she had an opportunity, she would have had hysterics, and

simply raised the roof." The girl hesitated and then added in a burst of confidence, "My mind has been racing around like an electric fan, and getting just about as far, but I've come to the conclusion that the murderer is a woman-hater. Not the kind you read about in the funny papers, but someone who is actuated by genuine hatred."

"Come now, Miss Courtney. You are letting your imagination run away with you," John protested.

"No I'm not." Her chin set obstinately. "I believe that when the murderer is discovered, if he ever is, that he will be someone who was once terribly hurt by a woman, so terribly that his mind has been affected and he has an uncontrollable impulse to kill every woman he sees. The only way he will be discovered is by searching into the past of all the men here, and find out which of them has had his life literally ruined by a woman." Carol had been so intent upon voicing her theory that she had been oblivious of the change in her companion's face. There was a grey shadow across his finely chiselled features, and his eyes smouldered.

"Are you accusing me?" he demanded in a strangled voice, blocking the path and glaring down at her.

Startled, the girl looked up. Her quick denial died on her lips, and her eyes widened in sudden fear as she saw his menacing expression. With an effort she controlled her impulse to run. A quick, involuntary glance behind her showed her that the winding, sun-blotched path between the trees was deserted. He would catch her in a few steps. Her heart pounded

at the thought that she was completely at the mercy of the man she had inadvertently accused of murder. Was he going to kill her too to protect the secret she had stumbled upon? She choked back a scream. Before help could possibly reach her, she would be dead, and he would be off. It must be her wits against his if she were to save herself, and she summoned all her feminine wiles to disarm his suspicion.

"Don't be absurd," she heard herself saying. "It never occurred to me that you could have killed them. My two favourite suspects in fact are Mr. Goodrich and Mr. Blake, but if you'd like to enter the lists, why I will be glad to consider your case." His eyes continued to blaze down wildly at her for another minute which seemed an eternity, while with all the courage at her command, she managed to keep a frank smile on her lips. With a dazed movement he finally rubbed his hand across his eyes. "I'm sorry," he muttered moving aside, "It was the shock of what you said—the thought that you suspected me." He paused and then repeated, "I'm sorry."

"What you need is a cup of coffee," Carol said, seizing on what seemed to be her one method of escape, and trying to make her voice sound natural. "You prescribed a walk for me, and now I advocate breakfast for you—for both of us."

Her taut muscles seemed to go limp, as she heard him say, "Perhaps you are right." He wheeled in the path, and silently they retraced their steps. Carol's mind was a battlefield of conflicting emotions. What

a fool she had been not to have realized that her remarks fitted the man beside her, and fitted him alone. Clarence Goodrich cared too much about himself to let anyone else hurt him vitally. Blake was too gross, too insensitive. But this man walking so quietly now beside her was capable of deep emotion, and had the temperament to brood for years over a wrong. Furthermore, if the gossip she had heard was true, he had the wrong to brood over. The girl he had cared for had let him down and married another man, while he was still sick and wounded. And yesterday, for the second time, she had betrayed his confidence to protect her worthless husband. Carol found herself making excuses for him. If he had killed Katherine, it had probably been at the instigation of Helen Goodrich, who wanted to rid herself of her husband's mistress, and then, when Helen discarded his devotion so casually in order to save her husband from suspicion, he might have gone haywire. Strangely enough, Carol's feeling now was no longer one of fear, but of sympathy—sorrow too, that his mind hadn't been strong enough to withstand the strain. Perhaps he was like Dr. Jekyll; had no control over his evil half. Or perhaps he didn't even know what he was doing, and forgot his crimes after the impulse had been satisfied. Could a thing like that be cured by psychoanalysis, or something, she wondered vaguely, or would it get worse. She no longer felt any fear—she seemed to know that if he had been going to kill her, he would have done so back there in the path. All

she felt now was pity, and a desire to protect him. No one must ever guess that he was the murderer. She would keep close to him, keep him away from the other women he might harm until she could persuade him to see some doctor who could help him. It's not his fault, she assured herself fiercely, he may have been shell-shocked, or something.

"Neither your brother nor mine seem to have put in an appearance," Carol said casually as they entered the dining room. "Shall we conserve a table and a waiter and have breakfast together?"

For a fraction of a second John hesitated. "Do you think you can put up with me after my outburst? I shouldn't think you'd ever want to set eyes on me again."

"I'm no human sacrifice," Carol's voice shook in spite of her flippancy. "I wouldn't suggest it if I didn't mean it."

John's look was one of wonder. "I didn't know there were girls like you. If I had—well things would have been quite different. Now it is too late. One can't undo the past."

"It isn't too late." Carol's slim brown fingers touched his white coat sleeve. "It isn't the past that matters. It's the present and the future—and that is still ours." She knew suddenly, as he gripped her hand in silent gratitude that she loved him no matter what he had done, and she was happy with a childish belief that her love could save him, not only from the police, but from himself.

CHAPTER XV

THE endless day, with its endless interviews, endless conferences and futile search for the weapon or some clue to the identity of the murderer, drew to a close. Evening found the tension of guests, servants and officers alike tightened almost to the snapping point.

Campbell was hunched over the desk in the little office, poring despondently over the voluminous notes he had assembled, as though he had hoped to tear the name of the murderer from the scattered sheafs of paper and again been defeated in his efforts. As a knock sounded on the door, he straightened his sagging shoulders and said quietly, "Come in."

"Miss Hancock is fully conscious now, Mr. Campbell," the trim, white-clad nurse announced. "Dr. Turner said you were to be informed as soon as she was able to see you. She is very weak, though, and I hope you won't stay long, or say anything to upset her." With a flick of her starched skirts she hurried back to her patient, while Campbell, with a sudden feeling of elation, scrambled together his notes, and followed close on her heels. "We were due for a break," he thought. "This must be it."

An improvised shade of paper shielded the bald electric light and threw a shadow over the girl lying in the big bed. Her light hair was strained back from

her forehead, making her pale blue eyes seem enormous in her small pointed face.

The officer drew up a chair and spoke gently. "I'm glad you are feeling better, Miss Hancock. I don't want to tire you, but if you are able to answer a few questions, it will help us a great deal."

The girl's eyes widened with a sudden gleam of interest, or was it fear? and her fingers clutched the bed-clothes spasmodically.

"How did you hurt your head?"

She seemed to relax, and her voice, though faint was steady as she whispered. "I had malaria. Quite bad. I got up to get some quinine. I think I fainted and hit my head against the bed."

"No one hurt you?"

She shook her head. Campbell expected the reply, but he had nursed a fantastic hope that the girl might have been attacked by the murderer, and might have recognized him.

"What time did it happen?"

The girl stared vaguely around the room, and replied without interest. "Late in the evening. I went to bed, and woke up with malaria."

"Where did you go earlier in the evening, Miss Hancock, about eight o'clock, or a little before?"

Her eyes darkened, and this time Campbell was sure that it was fear. "That is my business. I won't tell you." Her head turned restlessly on the hot pillow.

The nurse gave him a warning glance, and reluctantly he changed the subject. "You knew Miss Lowell?"

She nodded.

“Where did you meet her?”

“Here. I didn’t know anyone. No one paid any attention to me. She was the only one who was kind to me.”

“Did you see her often?”

“No. Just a few times. She met me walking the first time and asked me to come into her bungalow with her. Then she told me that I was to go to see her whenever I was lonely. I stopped in for a chat several times after that.”

“Have you any idea who could have killed her? Did she ever talk about herself?”

“She used to tell me funny things that had happened to her, and the queer places she had been. She used to make me laugh, imitating the different men she had known. She could take off Mr. Goodrich to perfection—you could fairly hear him talking and see him.”

“She didn’t care about Mr. Goodrich then?” Campbell made his voice casual.

“No. She didn’t care about any of the men she’d known. She just used them. She had the right idea.”

“Do you know who killed her, Miss Hancock?”

“No. I hope he gets his deserts though. Something always happens to the people I care about.” She brooded darkly, and two tears trickled slowly down her face. “I never have any luck.”

“I think that must be all, Mr. Campbell.” The nurse stepped forward and gently wiped away the girl’s tears.

Awkwardly the officer rose. “Well, thank you. I hope you feel better.” He hesitated by the door, and then making up his mind, risked the nurse’s displeasure

with another question. "Did you see anything of a black strap that the little Goodrich boy was playing with, Miss Hancock?" He watched the girl's face closely, but there was no change in its indifferent expression as she replied. "No, I never saw him playing with any kind of a strap."

Another hope dashed, Campbell thought as he clumped down the stairs. The girl was obviously hiding something. It might have been personal—a love affair that had gone wrong, or something of the sort. She was certainly feeling sorry for herself; that bit about being unlucky, and things always happening to the people she cared about. She hadn't expressed any sympathy for the Lowell woman, just pitied herself for the loss of a friend. She was a queer one. Her eyes had had a wild look, almost fanatical. He wished Ismael had seen her. The little chap had an uncanny gift for seeing through people. Perhaps he would have known whether the girl was always strange, or whether it was just her condition.

As the officer settled himself once more at his desk and began laboriously to note down the interview he had just had, he wondered again where Ismael had gone. The little Malay had merely asked permission to be away for a few hours. There was a closed-in look about him that forbade questions. Ismael had a disconcerting way of suddenly withdrawing behind his flat brown face until he was as inhuman as a Buddha. When he did that, there was no use trying to get any information out of him until he was ready to volunteer

it. One thing was certain, Ismael would never ask for time off when he was working on a case unless he had something definite and pertinent up his sleeve.

In the meantime, Ismael was perched on the last seat of the little cable train on his way to Penang. His short legs didn't touch the floor, and he had difficulty in balancing his rotund body as the train sped down the mountainside. So steep was the incline, that the cars were made like steps, each row of seats higher than the other so that the passengers wouldn't be pitched headfirst into the jungle below. Oblivious to that danger, Ismael teetered back and forth rhythmically to the lurching of the train. His lips quirked as he remembered Campbell's surprise when he had asked permission to absent himself. How scornful would have been his chief's expression had he known that Ismael was going to a Pawang!

As the train jerked to a stop against the station platform, Ismael hopped out and hailed a rickshaw to take him to his quarters. Fifteen minutes later, divested of his uniform, and comfortable once more in an ordinary bright-hued sarong and black baju, he was hurrying toward a small native kampong on the outskirts of the town.

Bamboo and clapboard houses clustered beneath cocoanut and durien trees. The cloying odour of cocoanut oil mingled with the smell of spiced, skewered meat (sati) cooking over small, charcoal fires that pricked the darkness of the tropic night. The light from native torches and cheap kerosene lamps illuminated the squatted figure of the old Malay sati-seller and the customers who crowded hungrily around him. Nude

and semi-nude children crouched among the groups of men and women, apeing the gestures and manners of their elders. From dimly-lighted huts, Ismael heard the chattering voices of women, the cries of mosquito-tormented babies, and the occasional sharp yelp of a pariah dog as he dodged a billet of wood.

Keeping well within the shadows, Ismael moved with swift, soundless steps, and like a wraith, disappeared through a gate in the bamboo palisade surrounding a large pandok¹ built high on stilts. His bulky figure climbed the rickety ladder with incredible silence, and slithered into the blackness of a corner of the veranda which encompassed two sides of the hut. With the familiarity of long experience, he peered through a wide crack in the clapboard wall.

The solitary, square room inside was illuminated only by a crude, evil smelling native lamp whose flickering light fell across the emaciated, bare head and shoulders of an aged Malay. The Pawang, Rias Bin Baka, squatted before, and gently fanned a glowing charcoal fire, whose dancing flames made weird shadows across the faces of Semut and half a dozen Malays who were present to assist in the rites. On the floor beside the Pawang were brass and earthenware bowls containing foods temptingly cooked to entice the spirit of the guilty person and appease the appetites of the djinns and the Pawang. Another bowl held what seemed to Ismael to be personal objects belonging to Semut and probably to all the people at the hotel. With quickened

¹ Hut.

interest he noted an apparently empty silver bowl—something he had never before seen at a Pawang's séance.

After a whispered colloquy with Semut, during which some object exchanged hands, the old Pawang enjoined the watchers to remain silent, and disregarding the teachings of the Mohammedan Faith, began a wild invocation to God, Krisna and the Pagan Spirits.

"Allah, Allah, by the will of the Prophet, and the power of Krisna, we, thy slaves, beseech of thee, and of the djinns of the winds and the spirits of the seas and the jungle, permission to hunt the badi¹ of evil which seeks to poison the mind of the white mata-mata,² with the belief that Tuan Besar Semut (Goodrich) has taken the lives of three women of his own race. Grant me, Oh Lord, spirits of the air, a vision of this doer of evil, who, because he stalks through the night like a ghost, must indeed be a son of Shaitan. I, a Pawang who knows thy way and can talk with you and carry out your will, beg that you show the heart of this person to me so that Semut may avenge with the kris, the insult to his tuan. Akal nya Allah dengan djinn sumoa. Allah sa alah-kum-Allah." So he ended the prayer to God and the spirits.

Taking a bowl of food in one hand, and sulphur in the other, the incantations of the Pawang became wilder and his speech so fast and guttural that it was unintelligible. Throwing the sulphur on to the charcoal, he produced from the silver bowl, one by one, three objects that were still invisible to Ismael's sharp eyes.

¹ Spirit.

² Policeman.

With loud, punctuated words, the Pawang explained to the spirits that these pale hairs were from the heads of the slain women, who from north, west and south had entered Penang by the will of God to meet their fate.

Suddenly, with all the skill of legerdemain, he produced a strap, the twin of the one with which Katherine Lowell had been strangled; a rock, such as that which might have crushed the head of Hester Page; and lastly, causing a gasp of annoyance and surprise from the peering Ismael, a stilleto-like paper knife—the weapon which had killed Madge Stevenson.

With accumulated frenzy and bodily contortions frightful to behold, to the accompaniment of his loud, agonized cries, the skeleton arms of the Pawang beat the strap, the stone and the knife on the three hairs in turn, and then one by one on each of the personal objects in the large bowl. Some of them, Ismael, with an involuntary smile, recognized; a pipe of John Townsend's, a jade ear-ring belonging to Mrs. Goodrich—

Foaming at the mouth, and with perspiration streaming from his body, the old man threw himself on to an invisible antagonist. Then began a wild, pantomimic struggle in which now the Pawang seemed the conqueror, and now the spirit. Three times the old man seemed to force the spirit toward the glowing charcoal, and three times it seemed to throw him back. Finally, weak and gasping with exhaustion, the Pawang gave up the struggle and sank, half swooning to the floor.

The straining, worried watchers sprang to his assistance and ministered to him with water and

massage until eventually the old man rose tottering to his feet and in angry tones exclaimed, "One man, a white man, because of fear in his heart, killed these three fair-haired women, but, by the will of Satan, there is present here a chelaka,¹ who, unsolicited seeks to use my powers, and the spirits will tell me no more. Let this offal of the devil seek for himself the killer!"

At his words, Semut and the other natives gazed suspiciously at each other, and then, as though satisfied, with one accord instinctively ran toward the door, but the wily Ismael, at the conclusion of the Pawang's accusation, had slipped away as stealthily as he had come.

Once out of sight and sound of the kampong, Ismael's pace slackened. He had many things which he wished to straighten out in his own mind before he faced Campbell. In the morning he would talk to Semut. His lips tightened as he thought again of the stilleto. Well, he would discover, among many other things, how that had come into Semut's hands. As for the personal trinkets of the guests, those he knew would be returned as casually as they had been borrowed. The words of the old Pawang haunted him. Somewhere in them was the clue he had been searching for. Automatically he heard himself echoing, "One man—a white man, because of fear in his heart, killed these three fair-haired women." Well, everyone knew it was a white man. "Because of fear in his heart!"—that, too, Ismael had surmised. "Killed these three fair-haired women!" The little Malay stopped short in

¹ Wretch.

his tracks. Could that be the answer? It seemed incredible. His mind went back to the Pawang's address to the spirits, and he repeated softly, "Pale hairs from the heads of the slain women, who from north, west and south entered Penang by the will of God to meet their fate. That was true—Mem Lowell had come from Australia; Mem Page from Harbin; and Mem Stevenson from England. And they were all fair-haired. They were all about the same age, too, so far as an inexperienced man could judge, though the Pawang hadn't mentioned that fact. The only things then that they had in common were their bloneness and their age. A white man who feared all young, fair-haired women? No, that was impossible. But, a white man who feared one young blonde woman—that might be. With knitted brows, Ismael carried his argument further. Why then did he kill three of them? The answer was obvious. It could only be because he didn't know the identity of the woman who menaced him.

Had the little bride been the one after all, or was the murderer wrong a third time. If he was——! How did those white women who were still alive on the mountain top look. Ismael's thoughts were feverish now. Lady Emily—dark, and she was too old. Her daughter too, dark! Mrs. Goodrich, dark! But the young American girl was fair, and the governess, at whom he had peeked, she, too, was fair. Ismael's steps quickened to a run, his blood seemed turned to water. Would he get back to the hotel in time to save those two women from the ruthless, diabolical killer, or was he already too late?

CHAPTER XVI

As Ismael, still hurrying, mounted the hotel steps, Campbell's voice greeted him from the shadowy depths of the veranda. "Well, where have you been?"

Ignoring the question, the little Malay asked breathlessly, "Is all well, tuan? There have been no more crimes?"

"No, of course not. What do you think this is, a bloody war? The guests retired an hour ago, and the constables are on duty outside their doors." The officer answered impatiently, and then, noting signs of unusual perturbation as the light from the open door streamed across the brown face of his assistant, he knocked out the ashes from his pipe and rose to his feet. "Come into the office where we can't be overheard and tell me what is on your mind."

As the office door closed behind them, Campbell switched on the light and motioned Ismael to a seat opposite him. "Now then!"

"I have come from the Pawang whom Semut consulted," the Malay began. Campbell's eagerness relaxed. "Good Lord, Ismael, I thought you were above that sort of bunk!" The officer's voice was sharp with disappointment.

Ismael regarded him with calm eyes. "Wait, tuan. I will not try to convince you of the powers of a Pawang.

I cannot explain the inexplicable. I will only report to you what I heard and witnessed, and you shall judge for yourself whether it has any value." With a half snort, Campbell tipped back in his chair and listened to Ismael's story of the séance. In spite of himself he grew interested, and when the Malay reached the point where the Pawang produced the stilleto, Campbell jumped to his feet, "By Jove, Ismael, where's the knife? Let's see it!"

Ismael shook his head. "I did not bring it, tuan. I think Semut still has it, or if not we will send to the Pawang for it to-morrow. I would have learned nothing, had I interrupted the séance to demand it."

To the Malay, Campbell's excitement seemed very childish; a trait in the white race about which he frequently marvelled. "The knife is not so important, tuan, as the three hairs," he said patiently.

"What do you mean, the knife is not important?" Campbell exclaimed. "Whose knife was it? Where did it come from? How did Semut get hold of it? Why, man, don't you see that that knife is the first real clue we have had?" The officer paced the floor in his perturbation.

"The knife can wait, tuan. It is the three hairs that are important: three pale hairs, from the heads of three slain women." Ismael's voice was sombre, and in spite of himself, once more Campbell stopped to listen. "Three women, all young, all fair, came here to Penang. One from Australia; one from Siberia;

and one from England; and here, in this hotel, one by one, they are killed."

"You aren't telling me anything new, Ismael." The Scotsman's tone was bitter. "What about it?"

"That is the answer to the problem, tuan. That is the motive for which we have searched. One of the men here had cause to fear a young, fair-haired woman. I think that is all he knew about her; that she was young and blonde. He killed Mem Lowell first. Then he either killed Mem Page because of what she had discovered, or perhaps because she, too, was fair. But from something that must have happened later, he realized that neither of those two was the right person, so then he killed Mem Stevenson. Does not that show you why I am alarmed?"

Campbell frowned, and then his eyes narrowed. "You mean that perhaps Mrs. Stevenson wasn't the right one either and that he may go on killing? But that is too fantastic altogether! Things don't happen that way. That Pawang business has turned your brain." Despite his disparagement, the officer's expression deepened to one of extreme worry. "How could a man be so terrified of a woman he didn't know that he would risk his neck killing every young blonde he met! It's preposterous."

Ismael said nothing. His bland face was set in obstinate lines.

"Do you mean to say that you think Miss Courtney and Miss Hancock are in danger, too, just because they are young and have light hair?" Campbell

scoffed and then, as he looked at the stolid figure of his assistant, his tone changed to one of surprise. "Good Lord, Ismael, you do mean that!" Slowly he lowered himself into a chair, without taking his eyes off the squat little Malay. "If you know so much, Ismael, who is the murderer?"

Ismael slowly shook his head. "That I am not yet prepared to say, tuan."

"You have an idea who he is?"

"An idea, sahaya, but that is not proof." The Malay's mouth was obstinate as he changed the subject. "Did you perhaps see Mem Hancock, tuan?"

Campbell shrugged. "Yes, but I didn't get much change from her. She couldn't throw any light on the murder of Miss Lowell beyond mentioning that the actress used to amuse her by imitating some of her beaux, among them Goodrich. I think if the governess had known anything she would have been glad to help us. She seemed fond of the woman. She is holding back something, though. I couldn't question her very long for the nurse stepped in."

"The strap, tuan. Did she remember seeing that?"

"She said she knew nothing about it. Hello! what's that?" The officer broke off to listen to the sound of approaching footsteps. A discreet knock sounded, and as Ismael opened the door, a grim little constable entered dragging a reluctant native by the arm. "I found this man trying to enter the first bungalow, tuan."

Campbell's face brightened as he recognized Semut.

"Good work, constable. Leave him with me." The man saluted and left the room.

"What were you doing at the Courtney's bungalow, Semut?"

Semut's face was inscrutable, but his dark eyes darted anxiously from door to windows.

"Look in his pockets, Ismael," Campbell directed. Semut tried to writhe away from Ismael's firm grip, and then with a shrug submitted to the search. One by one Ismael drew forth a miscellaneous collection: a pipe, an ear-ring, a dark bone hairpin, a tie-clip, a small handkerchief, a trouser button, a cigarette holder, a pocket-knife, a strap, and lastly from the folded top of the native's sarong, a stilleto.

"I was just returning these things which I borrowed," Semut protested. "There was no harm in it."

"Where did you get that knife?" Campbell asked eagerly seizing the stilleto.

Semut's face was expressionless. "I wished to help the mata-mata discover the evil-doer. My uncle is a very clever Pawang. He said if I would bring one thing belonging to each of the white tuans and mems, he would tell me who was the son of shaitan who killed the white women. I therefore borrowed from each a trifle which they wouldn't miss, and I was even now intent upon returning the objects to their owners. I am honest. I do not take what does not belong to me." He drew himself up proudly.

"What about this knife? Was it used to kill Mem Stevenson? Whose knife is it? Where did you get it?"

Campbell piled his questions one upon another in his eagerness.

A look of acute distress contorted the face of the Malay boy, and then he said reluctantly, "It was on the table where my Tuan Besar writes."

The officer grunted, and hastily consulted his notebook. For a moment there was silence in the room broken only by the turning of leaves and then by the scraping of a ruler as Campbell measured the stiletto and compared its blade with the description which Dr. Turner had given him of the weapon used to kill Mrs. Stevenson. "It's the knife, all right. The dimensions are the same, and look here, Ismael! there are still a couple of blood smudges near the hilt."

Ismael addressed the native in soft Malay. "Tell us how you found the knife, Semut, and why you took it. The truth will help your tuan, and will undo some of the harm you have caused by keeping the knife from us."

Semut broke into voluble protest. "My tuan did not do it. That I know in my heart. But I know, too, how strong is the power of the mata-mata, and that even though my tuan were innocent, the white mata-mata was going to arrest him. I heard talk of a knife which had killed Mem Stevenson, and I knew that such a knife was always on my tuan's table. I myself had brought it to him to cut the pages of a book. So, when the police began to search, I thought it would look very bad for my tuan if they found he had such a knife. Swiftly I went to the bungalow, thinking I would conceal it before the police came, and there on

the table it lay. The blade had been wiped clean, but on the hilt, as the tuan mata-mata discovered, were marks of blood. I knew then that some bungsat¹ had used it in his evil work, and that it was even more dangerous to my tuan than I had first thought. I took the knife to the Pawang, and I thought later on my way home I would cast it into the jungle, but the Pawang told me I must return it where I had found it in order that no bit of truth should be concealed from the police."

"Goodrich's knife is it! That puts the finishing touch on our case, Ismael," Campbell exclaimed in a satisfied tone.

The little Malay didn't seem to share his superior's enthusiasm. "It is too simple, tuan. You forget the cleverness of our murderer. Would a man who committed his crimes with such cunning, use his own knife, and leave it to be found?"

"It's the very thing he would do," Campbell declared. "He'd expect us to argue as you are doing—that the fact that his knife was found so openly would convince us of his innocence." Ismael looked thoughtful and Semut who was anxiously watching the expressions of the two officers, felt a cold wave of despair.

"Your argument is clever, tuan," Ismael admitted. "But I do not think Tuan Goodrich is the murderer. He is a man of impulse, not one of cold-blooded scheming. He is a prominent man with many friends. If we arrest him, and he is innocent, two things will

¹Worthless person.

happen. Ire panas¹ will be poured on the heads of the police, and the real murderer will be free to continue his crimes. If we arrest Tuan Goodrich, we will have no excuse for maintaining a guard here in the hotel." His voice became impressive with intense feeling. "Tuan, our first duty is to protect Mem Courtney and Mem Hancock. If evil befalls them, their blood will be on our hands as truly as though we ourselves had murdered them."

Campbell ran distracted fingers through his sandy hair. "What in hell are we to do then, Ismael? The case against Goodrich is complete—motive, opportunity, and the weapon!"

"The same case could be built up against Tuan Townsend, save for the weapon, and that he might have taken deliberately to cast suspicion on Tuan Goodrich. Also it could be true of Tuan Blake, or Tuan Courtney, or Tuan Pennington, or even of Tuan Gerry Townsend."

Semut whose worried eyes had flickered back and forth from the Malay policeman to the white officer, noted with a surge of thankfulness that the tuan mata-mata was losing his confidence, impressed by the unintelligible words of Ismael.

"How long do you want to hold off, Ismael?" Campbell asked finally in a tired voice.

"This is Sunday night," the Malay answered promptly. "The guests will be planning soon to leave, and we cannot hope to keep them here more than another day. I feel therefore that the murderer will

¹Hot water.

strike once more either at Mem Courtney or at Mem Hancock. His work is not yet done. Despite his wanton slayings, he is still in danger. For to-night, the women are safe. If word is passed along to-morrow that everyone will be free to leave on Tuesday, the murderer must act to-morrow, or to-morrow night if he would silence the tongue he fears."

"All right," Campbell capitulated. "You can have until Tuesday morning. I can't bring myself to believe your theory. It sounds gila¹ to me, but I don't want the responsibility of another murder. To-morrow we'll have a talk with Miss Courtney and Miss Hancock and see whether we can find out which of them is holding out on us."

"I haven't talked to Mem Hancock, tuan, but I am very sure that something preys on the mind of Mem Courtney,—something that is more than fear of the unknown."

"Well, I know that Miss Hancock is concealing something, but whether or not it is relevant to the murders, I can't figure out." Campbell's tone was edged as he added, "What about Semut here? Do you think he should be loose?"

"Ya, tuan. I think now he will be ready to help us. He will do anything to save his tuan, and his eyes and ears will be doubly keen. I will speak with him." In rapid Malay, Ismael addressed the anxious-eyed boy. At his words the native's face brightened, and his head nodded emphatically in agreement.

¹ Crazy.

Thankfully Semut slipped away, and Campbell resumed his uneasy strides. "I'm doing this against my better judgment, Ismael. You said that if I arrested Goodrich, and another woman was killed, I'd be responsible. The same thing now applies to you. If I don't arrest Goodrich and someone else is killed, you will be to blame."

Ismael replied gravely, "I know that, tuan, but I have a feeling in my heart that I am right. I pray that Allah will give me the wisdom to outwit the murderer." For a moment he seemed to brood, and then he added, "Mem Hancock is safe while she stays in her room, for the nurse is there, and we can keep a constable close by. It is Mem Courtney who is in greater danger, for she goes here and there and everywhere. I do not like the way she goes off alone with Tuan Townsend. All day they have been together, and each time I feared he would come back without the little American girl. Allah must have watched over her, or perhaps it was that the murderer was not yet ready to strike."

All night, like a restless ghost, Ismael wandered about the dimly-lighted corridors of the hotel. There was no opportunity for the sleepy-eyed, barefooted constables to doze at their post, or to relax their guard for more than a moment. Occasionally the little Malay wandered outside, but only to glance up at the shuttered windows of two rooms on opposite sides of the hotel to assure himself that the two girls sleeping there were safe. Never had he been so beset with

doubt and fear; doubt of that intuition which had solved so many crimes; fear for the lives of the two women left in his charge. Always before on a case he and Campbell had worked in harmony, seen eye to eye; Campbell tracking down painstakingly every clue; Ismael figuring out with an uncanny instinct the motive which had led to the crime, and thence to the criminal himself. Usually, by the time he had reached his conclusions, the facts which Campbell had ferreted out, fitted like the answer to a crossword puzzle, and the case was finished. These murders were different. There seemed to be no clues for Campbell to work on, and until Ismael had attended the Pawang's séance, nothing on which he could build up a case. He had known something of the nature of the murderer; his ruthlessness, his cold cunning, the swiftness with which he acted, but those characteristics belonged not to just one of the men at the hotel, but to three of them. Without the motive behind the murders, he hadn't been able to narrow down the suspects further than that. It was not until he was on his way back from Penang that he had suddenly grasped the whole terrible plot. Campbell had scoffed at the Pawang; had thought Ismael's theory fantastic, but what would he have thought had Ismael confided everything to him! Truly a white man could plan as darkly and as deviously as a Malay. Ismael could only hope that his own mind had followed correctly the fear-tormented actions of the murderer. If he could just be sure of that, then all was well, but his spirit was weighted by

the possibility that the half insane killer might act in a way that Ismael had not foreseen.

With the arrival of dawn, Ismael's worry increased. After all he had felt sure that nothing would happen that night. It was this day that was the fateful one. He shivered in the freshness of the breeze that swept through the lower hallway. If he was right, by tomorrow at the latest, the murderer would be under lock and key. If he was wrong, which Allah forbid! then another girl would be lying dead in a room upstairs or wherever the murderer had chanced upon her. He had a presentiment that no guard could protect her against the desperation of that fiend from hell. Her safety must depend upon Ismael alone, and upon him only because he had been fortunate to have guessed so much. If he could only be sure which girl it was who needed his protection! Was it the slim young American girl, with her charm and confidence, or was it the sick, embittered little governess?

CHAPTER XVII

IN the meantime, in their respective rooms upstairs, the two girls who were the object of so much concern on the part of Ismael, simultaneously awoke. In spite of the terrific strain of these last three days, Carol's heart was lighter than it had been in many months. Life had taken on a strange radiance, intensified by the shadowy horror that haunted the hotel. Her experience with John Townsend the previous morning, and her momentary fear of him seemed incredible now. Her lips quirked with suppressed amusement as she remembered it,—she didn't know which had been more absurd, her thought that he was the murderer, or her fantastic determination to save him in spite of himself and the police. Her eyes grew starry as she relived the later events of the day; the hours she had spent with him; his thoughtful understanding, the similarity of their tastes despite the difference in nationality, tradition and upbringing; the way his eyes darkened sometimes when he looked at her; his ringing laughter that came more and more often in response to her efforts; the way his hair grew back from his forehead, and the touch of grey at his temples; his bronzed, clear-cut face, and strong, brown hands.

"I really am in love," she thought with a trace of wonder. "And there isn't a chance in the world that

he will ever care for me that way." A quotation from an essay she had once read crossed her mind. "Love is not getting, but giving——" That was the way she felt. She had never understood before. All she wanted was his happiness; to make up to him for all his disillusion and unhappiness. She lay with a tender smile, dreamily watching the little chichaks as they chased mosquitoes across the whitewashed ceiling. At least she had accomplished one thing. He enjoyed being with her. She no longer was the one to seek him out, as she had done at first. It was he now who watched and waited for her. Lazily she held up her arm and glanced at her watch. "Mercy, I'll have to hurry if we are to get in a set of tennis before breakfast!" she exclaimed, springing out of bed, appalled at the thought of losing a single minute with the man she loved.

Across the hall, Katherine Hancock, too, was staring up at the white ceiling, but her thoughts were very different. Mike had sat wriggling on the edge of her bed the evening before, and had tried to entertain her by telling her of his father's plans for him—the new pony he was to have, and the tutor. That meant hunting up a job as soon as she was well enough. She didn't care about the Goodrich family, but they paid her regularly and well, and she had thought she was settled for a couple of years, long enough to save some money so that she could get away from the East. How she hated it! The eternal blue skies, the stiff palms, the malaria and the gasping heat, the

indifference of the men—at least of the ones she would like to know—and the snobbishness of the women, all of them so smug and so secure. Her hands clenched, and her pale eyes flashed. She was as good as any of them, if only she had a chance to show them. If she could afford to buy the right sort of clothes, get herself a permanent wave—live in a decent climate where she could lose the sallowness which the sun had burned into her skin.

Well, at least she was feeling better this morning. The ache of malaria had left her flesh. Her attacks were bad, but they never lasted long. If she hadn't been fool enough to have hit her head the other night, she would have been quite all right by this time, and would have kept her job. She had always been unlucky. Things always broke wrong for her, as they had for her mother. No use getting all unstrung thinking about her mother,—the poor thing was well out of this world. Would Mr. Goodrich do the decent thing and give her an extra month's salary? That was the main thing now. She only had twenty pounds saved up and she'd be in a bad way if she didn't find a job. Why couldn't the murderer have chosen her instead of Katherine Lowell or the Page girl! She wouldn't have to worry then. Or while he was about it, why didn't he kill the English girl, or the American. Why should they have everything; beauty, money, clothes—love!—and she nothing! Of course, if she wanted to, she could always get money from her father, but she'd rather starve to death as her poor mother had, than take a

penny from him. God how she hated him! She hated almost everyone, but him most of all.

The nurse stirred in her chair and opening her eyes, yawned. "Well, how do you feel this nice morning?" She stood smiling down professionally at Katherine.

"Better, thanks."

"No more fever? How's your poor head?"

Katherine stared distastefully at the manicured hand that grasped her wrist, at the little rosebud mouth that was murmuring to itself, "One, two, three——"

"If you could give me something for my headache, I'd be all right," the governess muttered, snatching her hand away.

"I'll ask the doctor, when he comes," the nurse murmured.

Katherine's face set stonily as the door opened to admit Mrs. Goodrich. Her solicitude was a joke, if you could only think of it that way, the governess thought. Slipping in and out every few minutes, watching with those black-lashed eyes of hers, and all the time working on her husband to get a tutor for the kid and do Katherine out of a job. She pulled herself up short. This would never do. She'd have to act sweet and helpless and grateful, if she was going to get more than just her bare salary out of the Goodriches.

Helen smiled down at her. "You look much better, my dear. The doctor thought you'd be able to go down on the veranda for a little while this afternoon, won't that be nice?"

Katherine swallowed twice before she managed to say, "Thank you. I'm sorry to have been such a nuisance." She made an effort to add, "You've been very good to me," but the words stuck in her throat.

With an encouraging little nod, Helen's smartly cut white dress flashed out of the room. Once more Katherine was free to torture herself with the bitterness of her reflections.

All day a constable hovered outside the door where Katherine lay, and all day Ismael unostentatiously kept the American girl in sight. He had watched her playing tennis before breakfast; had been on the veranda outside the window when she and her brother shared their breakfast table with the two Townsend men; had strolled after them when they went for a walk; had sat nearby when they chatted on the veranda.

When due allowance had been made for the strain under which the guests were all living, they seemed to be acting quite naturally. There was an undercurrent of fear, naturally, glances of worry and suspicion, but with Campbell's announcement at tiffin that they would all be free to leave the following morning, the tension had relaxed, and their voices once more began to sound normal. Everyone had received the news with relief apparently, with the exception of Pennington whose sense of British justice appeared to be outraged. "Have you discovered the murderer yet?" he asked eagerly and, as Campbell shook his head, the manufacturer protested, "I don't

want to interfere, of course, but you know, it seems a bit strange your letting everyone leave this way. You will never be able to solve the crimes if the guests scatter. Don't you think you ought to hold some of them?"

"I thought you were anxious to leave, Mr. Pennington," Campbell replied in a surprised tone.

"I am, of course. But after all there is something involved, you know, beyond one's personal preferences." Pennington's tone was indignant. "I thought you chaps knew your job, and could handle the case. I didn't want to interfere, but, by George! I can't understand this latest move of yours."

"We can't hold people here indefinitely, Mr. Pennington. Lady Emily has threatened to appeal to the Governor-General, and young Courtney has already phoned to the American Consul. We are working along several lines, and I can assure you that we will do our best to find the murderer."

The manufacturer's eyes brightened. "Oh, so that's it. Going to give the bird enough rope to hang himself. I should have realized that if I hadn't been taken by surprise. Not a bad idea. In fact, I've seen it work out in England. Sorry I was hasty." He hesitated, and then said, "If there is anything I can do, just say the word."

Campbell's official manner relaxed a trifle. "That's very decent of you, sir. I don't mind admitting that it is a tough case—the most baffling in my experience. If we don't lay hands on the chap before you sail,

perhaps you will be willing to make a deposition for me?"

"Gladly, gladly, though I'm sorry not to see the end of the case myself. Still, these things can't be hurried. I know from my own somewhat limited experience that you have to have your evidence all lined up. Yes, dear, I'm coming at once," he added as Lady Emily's impatient voice called him. "Don't worry about packing my suits. I'll do them myself." He smiled at the officer, "It won't be the first time either—only in the old days I thought myself lucky when I had an extra suit to pack."

"Nice chap that, Ismael, no side about him," Campbell said to his assistant as Pennington hurried away. "Most of the bigwigs who have made their pile in a hurry would rather be drawn and quartered than admit they weren't born with a million pounds clutched in their fists."

Ismael nodded absentmindedly. "They are bringing Mem Hancock down on the veranda for tea. Dr. Turner needed the nurse for an emergency case, so they had to let her go back to Penang," he said with apparent irrelevance.

"Yes, so the doctor told me a little while ago. I had another talk with the governess. She told me she didn't know whether Goodrich was in the bungalow or not at the time Miss Lowell was killed. Implied she didn't care much either. She certainly has a one track mind if ever I saw one, and it simply runs in circles around herself. From all accounts, the only

other person she ever cared about was her mother who died out in South Africa a couple of years ago. I can't make her out. Either she is always unbalanced, or that bump on her head knocked a screw loose. If she hadn't been sick in bed when Miss Page and Mrs. Stevenson were done in, I'd suspect her of the murders."

The conversation was interrupted by the Chinese clerk who called Campbell to the telephone. Ismael sat on in a brooding silence until the officer appeared on the veranda once more. "That was headquarters," he announced with satisfaction. "The cables have come in from England and America, and I've got to go down to Penang to decode them. Think you can manage all right while I'm gone?"

For a moment the little Malay looked troubled, and then with a fatalistic shrug he murmured, half to himself, "The will is the pleasure of Allah. Sahaya, tuan. I will do my best."

A few minutes after Campbell strode away from the hotel, the guests began to assemble for tea. Carol Courtney, whose afternoon nap had temporarily shifted the responsibility for her safety from Ismael's shoulders to that of the capable constable stationed near her door, appeared looking lovelier than ever in a rose coloured dress that matched the unusual colour in her cheeks. John Townsend, who had been restlessly pacing the veranda as he watched the door, hurried to her side—his eyes warm with admiration. As they sauntered toward the most remote tea-table, a native boy hurriedly held open the screen door for

Semut and one of the house servants who were carrying Katherine Hancock to the long chair which had been arranged for her in a sheltered vantage place from which she could see the guests. Either her face was more peaked than usual, or her eyes seemed larger. Ismael couldn't decide which. Indifferently she permitted Semut to place pillows behind her head, and leaned back against them. With strained attention she was watching John Townsend's dark head as it bent across the table toward Carol's bright one. A spasm crossed the face of the little governess at the sound of their mingled laughter. She turned her head away quickly and began to watch the front steps. Gerry and Bob appeared simultaneously, one from the path, and one from the hotel, greeted each other cheerily and together moved toward a table. "Guess we'd better not try to crash that party," Bob said with a grin, nodding toward his sister.

"You've said it in one!" Gerry chuckled. "Never knew John to take a shine to any woman before, except Helen Goodrich, of course. He's a queer sort of duck, requires a lot of knowing, but he's the best ever."

"Hello, hello, look who's sitting up for tea!" Bob exclaimed, pausing in front of the little governess and smiling down at her. "Feeling okay again?"

"Awfully glad to see that you're fit enough to be down," Gerry said shyly. A look of surprise crossed Katherine's face as she looked up into the two attractive boyish faces. "Thank you," she murmured with a catch in her voice, but before she could say more,

Bob had whirled to watch the approach of the Pennington family. Lady Emily swept past complaining bitterly to her husband because he had refused to ask Campbell for the strap belonging to her suitcase. "It's nonsense. I don't believe the strap was ever used to kill that woman. If it was, she probably deserved it, and anyway, you don't expect me to hold the bag together all the way down to Penang do you?" Diane trailed along behind them, looking more ethereal than ever in a cornflower blue dress that exactly matched her eyes. Bob caught his breath, and stepped forward eagerly to meet her but with a warning glance from under her long lashes, she passed without speaking. Just for a second though, her slim white hand touched his, and a wave of colour mounted to the roots of his hair.

The little governess stiffened in her chair. They were gone, both those nice boys who had stopped to speak to her; dragged away by that sawdust doll who hadn't the spirit to defy her mother. There they were now, both of them, sitting down at the next table, just in order to be near her, waiting to catch one of her sly smiles, and the American boy looking as though the band was playing the Star Spangled Banner, just because she had tried to hold his hand.

With a start, the invalid realized that one of the waiters had moved a table close to her long chair, and was carefully setting down a tea tray. "Make the tea strong," she ordered, "and then get me some writing paper and a pencil." The boy looked bewildered

and Ismael who had been sitting unnoticed close by, translated her wishes into Malay.

"Thanks," she said, regarding the detective with complete indifference. He was used to that. Most white people couldn't distinguish one native from another, taking them all as much for granted as they did the palm trees and the chichaks. It simplified things very much, for it left him free to study them. They didn't bother to adjust their masks for him, and the occasional glimpses he had of their nakedness was often helpful.

Helen and Clarence Goodrich came along next, with Mike prancing ahead of them. They all stopped to speak to the governess. Helen bent down and readjusted the pillows, inquiring in a low musical voice whether she was warm enough, whether she wouldn't like a little wrap perhaps. The girl had seemed to wince away from Helen's touch, but her voice was unemotional as she thanked her politely.

"Glad to see you are better, Miss Hancock," Clarence said awkwardly. "Think you'll be able to travel tomorrow? We're all clearing out of here in the morning."

"I didn't know." The words were barely audible, and she continued more firmly, "I'll be ready to leave whenever you wish."

"Don't worry about it, my dear," Helen said. "We'll have you carried down to the train, and you'll have a nice long rest as soon as we get to Singapore." With a nod and a smile she hurried Mike, who had been surreptitiously eating the cookies from Katherine's

tray, toward the nearest table. The governess's lips tightened,—the hateful child had taken all the cakes she liked best. With a strange glitter in her eye, she began to write.

Blake didn't appear at all, Ismael noticed. Either tea wasn't his beverage, or he was busy packing and forgot the hour. Stevenson too, was missing, but Ismael had seen him come out on the veranda, glance at the festive tables, and then with averted face, dash down the steps and along the path that led toward the station. His actions were compatible with those of a recently bereaved husband.

Once more the sun was sinking in the west, and its rosy light was reflected on the faces of the guests, who, having completed their tea, were moving restlessly away from the disordered tables. Katherine had finished her letter and sealed it. She looked across at Ismael. "Will you send for Semut, please? It is getting chilly here and I'd like to go back to my room."

Ismael summoned a waiter, and a few minutes later, Semut and one of the Chinese boys carried the girl upstairs. That is well, Ismael thought, with a sigh of relief. She would be safe now. Suddenly remembering that the constable might not be on duty there, he hurried off to place a temporary guard at the door of the governess's room. Semut met him in the hall. "Here is a letter that Mem Hancock wished me to deliver. You told me to report everything to you." Ismael nodded. "That is right, Semut, wait here for me." Hastening into the little office, without compunc-

tion he steamed open the envelope and read the outpourings of Katherine's pen. His face settled into lines of satisfaction. Five minutes later he handed the letter to Semut who had risen from his squatting position outside the door. "Do with this as the Mem requested."

Semut glided away without a word, just as the telephone in the office began a shrill summons. It was Campbell asking for Ismael, and for fifteen minutes the little Malay was kept busy answering questions as to the whereabouts and welfare of each guest. Campbell's own remarks were cryptic. He had only had time to decode one cable. It held interesting information, but he would tell Ismael more when he saw him in the course of the next couple of hours.

When the Malay was free again to return to the veranda, he was distressed to find the porch deserted. Rapid enquiries of the waiters elicited the information that Mem Courtney had left with Tuan Townsend. Ismael choked back an exclamation of dismay. No one had noticed where the couple had gone. The waiters had been too busy clearing away the tea-things and putting the veranda into order. Frowning, Ismael walked to the front steps. Which path had they taken? Every minute, he felt was precious, but before he could determine in which direction to start, a tall figure came hurrying toward him out of the gloom. "Have you seen Miss Courtney, Ismael? She's gone and I can't find her!" John's face was ashen with fear, or some other deep emotion, and his words came in breathy gasps.

CHAPTER XVIII

ISMAEL'S hand grasped Townsend's arm in a vice-like grip. "Where is she? She went with you."

"No she didn't. We started off together, and then I went back to get my pipe. She said she'd go on down to her bungalow to change her slippers. The dew is heavy and we were going up on the crest to see the sunset. Her brother had gone down to the bungalow to pack. It was still quite light then and I thought she'd be all right. She was insistent that we shouldn't waste any time lest we miss the sunset." John's face was pale, and his voice shook.

"Quick, quick!" In his impatience, Ismael jerked John's arm as though to shake the information out of him.

Townsend swallowed hard. "I got my pipe and tobacco, and walked down to meet her. I hadn't been gone five minutes. She wasn't anywhere along the path, and when I reached the bungalow, she wasn't there either. Bob hadn't seen her. He's out looking now, and getting the fellows together. I hoped against hope that she might have returned to the hotel for something, so I came back to look here, and to tell you. My God, man! do you suppose anything has happened to her?"

Ismael glared at him for a second, and then whirled

toward the dining-room. The constables, hastily summoned, scattered like bloodhounds along the paths, all except the man on duty outside Katherine's door. The Chinese boys, pressed into service, started off to round up the guests. Half crazed with fear, John stumbled away from the hotel, blindly following the path that led toward the bungalows. Perhaps Bob had found her.

After John had started back to the hotel for his pipe, Carol had walked swiftly along the path, intent only upon changing her silken slippers as quickly as possible. Her time with John was limited now. Only a few more hours and then they would separate. Oceans and mountains would be between them, with small hope of their ever meeting again. She begrudged each moment away from him. Engrossed with her thoughts, she was heedless of the man who was striding rapidly along the path toward her.

"Miss Courtney!"

Startled she looked up and recognized Mr. Pennington.

"This is providential," he said. "I was hoping for a few words alone with you, but I didn't know how I was going to manage them."

"A few words with me!" she repeated in surprise. He had turned and was walking beside her.

He smiled reassuringly. "You are surprised, of course. I'm afraid you have been so wrapped up in your own affairs that you haven't had time to observe a situation which has developed here."

Her surprise gave way to impatience. This man meant nothing to her. He was merely a busybody who was keeping her away from John. Her steps quickened. Pennington put a hand on her arm. "Please, Miss Courtney, bear with me. Give me just a few minutes. The happiness of two people depend upon it. One who is close to you, your brother, and one who means everything in the world to me, little Diane."

Startled at his words, she stopped and looked at him in amazement. "Bob and Diane!" she repeated blankly.

"I told you that you had been too absorbed in your own affairs to have noticed them," he reproached her. Her conscience smote her with the truth of his remark.

"What is it? What about them?" she asked in an anxious tone.

"I can't talk to you here." His voice dropped to a whisper. "My wife is apt to come along any minute, and what I have to say is confidential. Let us follow this path." He motioned to a little used trail that twisted gloomily between overhanging trees and tangled underbrush. The main path was still illumined with a pink light, but its narrow offshoot was already grey with ominous black shadows. Carol hesitated, and again his pressure on her arm urged her forward. He was talking easily now, having accomplished his purpose, but occasionally he stumbled, muttering an imprecation under his breath. "Can't seem to keep my balance in the dark, since my illness last spring. Sorry

to be so dashed clumsy," he apologized. "I have been watching Diane and your brother very carefully these last few days, and I have seen many little things. Oh, intangible trifles, glances and blushes, the touching of their hands—you know what I mean." Carol nodded, she knew only too well.

"I have the reputation of being what you Americans call a hard-boiled business man. I have spent my life trying to get ahead in the world. I have let nothing and nobody stand in my way, but now that I have reached my goal, I am beginning to realize that success isn't everything; that somewhere along the way I have missed out. This isn't an apology, you understand. Being what I am, I couldn't have acted differently, but I want Diane not only to have everything I can give her, but other things too. I want her to be happy. I am convinced that she is in love with your brother. I don't know him at all. I don't know whether she will be safe with him. If she will, then I will do everything in my power to help them both."

Carol frowned. She was impressed by his obvious sincerity—but Bob! light-hearted, fickle Bob! Was he really in love with the little English girl, or was it merely one of his periodic infatuations? She tried hard to remember what Bob had said, how he had acted lately. He had been different, quieter, more thoughtful, more considerate. From somewhere in the back of her mind she recalled the earnestness of his voice and his boyish face as he had said, "I'm serious this time, Kay." At the moment she had discounted it. Lady

Emily obviously had other plans for her daughter, and she was a woman who brooked no interference. Diane was to make a good match, and no middle-class American, no matter how attractive, could hope to enter the lists.

“What about Lady Emily?” Carol asked at length.

“That is what I meant when I said I would help them. If you think your brother cares for Diane and will make her happy, I’ll back them against my wife.”

“I think he does,” Carol said slowly. “I remember all sorts of little things now that didn’t register with me at the time. Diane seemed so out of reach! I was very blind.”

Pennington beamed. “That part is all right then. I’ll take care of Lady Emily. It has taken me many years to learn how to manage her. I have always, until just lately, been overawed by her. She was so far above me socially. I never even finished grammar school. My people were nothing. All I had to recommend me was a gift for making my way and accumulating money. I have always been able to hold my own with everyone except my wife, and I’ve been so damn grateful to her all these years for marrying me, that I’ve been nothing more than a lackey. Not until we came here to Penang and ran into these deplorable tragedies did I realize that all she needed was firmness. It isn’t going to be easy to force her approval. She has a man picked out in England for Diane, a weak-chinned, spindly-legged ass with a title and a big estate. Diane might have been happy enough with

him—she is very docile, too gentle for her own good—if she hadn't fallen in love with your brother. She would never have the spirit to stand up to her mother. She has been dominated by her too long. But I'm not going to see the child's life ruined." His voice softened. "She was only about eight when I married her mother, and she took to me right from the start. She used to tip me off about things—the right forks to use, and things like that until I got my bearings. When I'd pull a boner, and I used to pull plenty of them along at first, she'd slip away from her nurse and come into my room to comfort me. We had a sort of tacit conspiracy, protecting each other from her mother."

The last bit of grey had been blotted from the path, but through a break in the tall, overhanging trees, a seat shone, faintly white. Pennington's voice took on a harsher note as he said. "Sit down."

Carol's heart thumped wildly. "Really, Mr. Pennington. I must go back."

"Sit down," he repeated, and again his hand tightened on her arm as though warning her that she couldn't get away from him. Frightened, she obeyed him. He settled himself beside her. "That's better, I won't keep you much longer. I want you to tell me about yourself and your brother. I must be prepared for my wife's catechism, you know." His voice still seemed to hold a menacing note, but it might just be due to his emotion. The whole conversation had been strange, bewildering—Bob and Diane, and this queer man who wanted their happiness.

Carol made an effort to control her rising fear, and to speak naturally. "There isn't much to tell, I'm afraid, Mr. Pennington. Bob and I are alone in the world. Our mother and father were killed in an automobile accident when we were quite young." He leaned toward her, and she could feel his hot breath against her cheek. She shrank away from him.

"And your family? What were they?" His question had a forced note of apology. "That is what will concern my wife most deeply."

"They didn't come over in the *Mayflower*, if that is what you mean, but they have been in America for several generations. Dad was in the automobile business, and was fairly successful. He wasn't very old when he died, so he didn't leave a fortune by any manner of means, but it is plenty for Bob and me to live on comfortably."

The man beside her relaxed. "The money doesn't matter. I have that. I just wanted to be sure that Bob came from good stock. He seems like a nice boy. If I had had a son, I would have liked one like him."

Carol's fear left her as suddenly as it had come. Mr. Pennington was a pathetic old thing, and what he was preparing to do for Diane wasn't going to be easy. She didn't underestimate Lady Emily's opposition, nor, she felt, did he, for all his brave words. Impulsively she reached out her hand. "If what you think is true, and things work out as you want them to, then you will have a son, Mr. Pennington."

"I know, I know, but it's not quite the same thing. Still, I'd rather see my business in his hands than in the hands of that nincompoop Lord Cecil." For a moment he brooded, and then he rose abruptly. "You've been very sweet and patient, my dear. Thank you. I won't keep you any longer."

The sound of footsteps crashing through the underbrush startled them, and a hoarse voice called, "Carol, Kay!"

In spite of its hoarseness, she recognized the voice, and her heart beat faster. "Here I am!"

"Darling, are you all right?" Before she realized what had happened, she was in his arms, her answer smothered by his eager lips. "Oh my dear, my dear! If anything had happened to you!" He released her suddenly and peered into the darkness at Pennington. "He didn't hurt you, did he?"

"Of course not, silly." Carol assured him, snuggling closer to the warmth of his body.

The older man stepped nearer. "I'm sorry you were worried, Townsend. It was thoughtless of me to have kidnapped Miss Courtney in this way, but she was quite safe, you know. You didn't think I was going to murder her did you?" He chuckled at the idea.

"I didn't know," John muttered, clutching Carol in his arms again.

"Why! Good Lord!" Pennington spluttered. "What would I do that for! You're crazy, man." Then he laughed again. "I suppose those awful

murders have got home to all of us. Personally you have always been my pet suspect."

"I!" John exclaimed in amazement, "What made you suspect me? I didn't even know the women!"

Carol hesitated. This was the time to rid her own conscience of its burden of doubt. "You know, John, I, too, thought that you might have been the one. Your being down at the bungalow, you know, and what Mrs. Goodrich said, and then you looked so strange the other morning when I said I thought the murderer was someone who had been terribly injured by some woman."

John rubbed his fingers through his hair. "Why! Good Lord! I don't know any more about the murders than you do. The only reason I went down to that damned bungalow was because Helen asked me to talk to the woman and see how much money she wanted to go away. She lashed into me for all she was worth, and I fairly scuttled away from her tongue. I wouldn't give Helen away, of course—things were black enough for Clarence without that. As for the other morning, when you said the things you did, I was almost beside myself. I knew then how much you meant to me, and the thought that you could imagine such a thing, that perhaps you only put up with me in order to catch me out, fairly bowled me over."

"I think we are all a bit goofy." Carol dismissed the subject lightly, her hand gripped tightly in John's. "You suspecting Mr. Pennington, and both of us suspecting you."

"I didn't suspect him," John protested. "That is not until Mike told me you had gone off with him up this lonely trail—then I went batty. I'm sorry, sir." He turned toward the dim, white bulk of Pennington's figure.

"That's all right. I apologize to you too. I suppose Bob is worried about his sister. I'll go back and reassure him. You can follow along when you are ready."

"My word! I forgot all about him, and the others!" John's tone was flat. "They have all the police and the servants out hunting for you Kay. If the wind hadn't been in the wrong direction you'd have heard their shouts. Lord, but you frightened us." Again his arms crushed her. "I'm never going to let you out of my sight again."

They were oblivious to the stumbling, receding footsteps of the older man as he tried to pick his way along the path.

Back at the hotel, Ismael was pacing the veranda like a caged lion. Should he join the search for the American girl, or should he stay and watch over the governess. He knew, after reading her letter, that it was Katherine Hancock that the murderer had been seeking all the time, but unless the killer realized that, the American girl was in as much danger as the English girl. He might already have killed her. If he had, then the governess had sealed her own death sentence too, for the murderer would inevitably discover his mistake and remedy it. Once more voices were calling

a girl's name along the paths, once more men, white, yellow, and brown were feverishly searching. Once more lights flickered and flared among the trees.

Perhaps he could find the American girl and save her, if he could only bring himself to leave the hotel. "Allah direct me!" Ismael murmured in an agonized whisper, hesitating by the front door. "Shall I seek the American, or shall I go up and watch over the little English mem?" For a moment he stood with bent head, and then with sudden resolution, turned his back on the veranda steps and went quickly into the hotel. At the top of the wide stairs he spoke to the constable stationed outside the door of Katherine Hancock's room, bidding him join the search for the American girl. As the little policeman hurried down the steps, Ismael knocked softly on the door. There was no reply. Anxiously he spoke, "Miss Hancock. It is I, Ismael. May I enter?" Still there was no response. With rising fear lest he was too late to save her the sturdy little Malay turned the handle of the door and, as it swung slowly, silently open, stepped into the menacing darkness of the quiet room.

CHAPTER XIX

ISMAEL stood just inside the door, every sense straining to penetrate the silent blackness of the room. With a sigh of relief, his sharp ears caught the sound of gentle breathing from the bed. So far, so good. The girl was still safe. Should he waken and warn her of her danger, or should he quietly await events? The governess was an unknown quantity—better not risk rousing her. If his theory was right, he was there to protect her when the murderer appeared. If he was wrong, well then, nothing would be gained by alarming her. Gently he closed the door and took his place against the wall between the door-jamb and the wardrobe. He was out of sight of the girl, but his eyes, accustomed now to the darkness, distinguished the whiteness of the bed with its canopy of mosquito netting. After a few moments he heard her stir uneasily, and as she sighed, he realized she had awakened.

The springless bed creaked with her movements, and then she switched on the light at the head of her bed. Ismael shrank further back into the shadows, but the girl who lay quietly staring at the shuttered windows in front of her, didn't glance in his direction. The paper which the nurse had pinned around the light left the girl's face shaded, though it mercilessly

illuminated the helplessness of the meagre body outlined beneath the bedclothes. Suddenly Ismael stiffened. The stairs outside were groaning under a stealthy weight. A loose board in the hall squeaked, and then softly the doorknob turned. The girl started and her eyes shifted toward the door which swung slowly open, concealing Ismael.

"Well," she exclaimed. "What do you want?"

A voice, familiar in its suaveness answered, and Ismael thrilled with triumph. Although he couldn't see the man on the other side of the open door, he knew who it was. His reasoning had been correct.

"I received a letter from you, my dear. Several, in fact," the man said. "But until a few minutes ago, I was uncertain of the identity of the writer. It took me some time to figure out who you were. I only knew that your name began with K. At least that was how you signed your notes. K for Katherine, if my memory serves me rightly?—and that you were light-haired,—or used to be. I really discovered you by the process of elimination." His short laugh was harsh, and Ismael clenched his hands at the killer's casual reference to his victims. There was a menace in his words to which the governess seemed oblivious.

"Well, now you know." Her voice held a strange note of satisfaction. "You know what I think about you, too. At first I was going to tell you who I was, but I decided it would worry you more if you didn't know."

"A costly mistake, on your part." The man's chuckle set Ismael's teeth on edge.

"How much do you want for your silence?" His voice was gruff now and brutal.

"There's not enough money in the world to buy it." The girl's reply was prompt. "You are going to pay all right, but not in money. I wouldn't touch your dirty money,—not if I was starving." Her voice was ugly in its shrillness.

"What do you want then?" The man sounded genuinely puzzled.

"I'm going to drag you down, down to the gutter where you left me. That's what I'm going to do. I'm going to tell everyone the sort of man you really are. I'm going to ruin you, and everyone connected with you."

"So that's your game is it? Well, we'll see about that." He pushed the door closed behind him and moved a few steps toward her.

"Keep away from me. If you come any closer, I'll scream."

"Scream away, my dear. It won't do you any good. There's not a soul in the hotel except ourselves."

"That's a lie," she said fiercely. "You can't bluff me."

"Oh no it's not. Everyone has gone out to look for Miss Courtney who is strangely missing. My luck is in. I couldn't have arranged better if I'd tried. There are no witnesses to this scene. There is no help for you unless you do what I want you to. I'll still give you a chance. You have pluck—more pluck than the others." He paid grudging tribute to her fearlessness.

"Be sensible. How much money do you need to live decently for the rest of your life?" He was standing beside the bed now with his broad back toward Ismael.

The girl sat up straight, the better to defy him. "Money! That's always been your god. You've bought everything you wanted always, but I have something you can't buy. You talk about your luck! That's over. I am the lucky one now. Your luck stopped when you came to Penang, and mine began." Hatred glared from the small, peaked face. Unintelligible as the conversation sounded to Ismael, the two apparently understood each other. There was the same defiance, the same streak of superstition. The man started at her words, and for the first time seemed to lose some of his confidence. Furtively he glanced over his shoulder as though to assure himself that the room was still empty. Ismael shrank into the shadows, but his thickset body was tense, every muscle waiting to do his bidding.

"We'll see about that," the man muttered. "You've had your chance, which was more than I gave the others."

"What others?" The girl seemed struck by the repetition.

"Those others—with light hair." He brushed them aside, and bent forward, his hand on the mosquito net.

The girl's voice was hoarse with emotion. "You are the murderer then. You! You killed Katherine Lowell!" With sudden fury she sprang at him. "God

damn you!" she screamed, her fingers clawing his face.

With a coarse oath, the man flung the frail girl back on the bed. Grabbing her by the throat and brutally placing his knee across her writhing body, with his free hand he seized a pillow and pressed it down hard across her livid face.

With the silence and litheness of a tiger, Ismael's rotund figure bounced across the room. Grunting with satisfaction, and with primitive disregard of danger, the little Malay threw himself on the larger and heavier man. Caught unaware, the assailant struggled furiously in that ber-gomul grip which is half jiu-jitsu and half catch-as-catch can. Before the partially strangled girl recovered sufficiently to scream, the wiry Ismael had the white-faced murderer in a gorilla-like grip. At last the girl's pent-up screams began to rip the darkness of the tropic night. Answering cries echoed from the search parties, and there was the sound of running feet. Even as two panting Malay constables with drawn batons burst into the room, Ismael succeeded in handcuffing his prisoner to the iron bedrail.

Following close on the heels of the two policemen came Bob and Gerry, and then suddenly the room was filled with gaping people all exclaiming and questioning. With a deliberation that was in marked contrast to his former activity, Ismael was exploring the pockets of the rumpled, torn white suit of the man on the floor. The girl, still holding her bruised throat, crouched on the far side of the bed, watching the prisoner with

cat-like malevolence. "Wah!" Ismael grunted his satisfaction as he drew out a crumpled letter.

Heavy footsteps pounded up the stairs. "What's all this?" Still breathless from running, Campbell elbowed his way through the group of policemen, servants and guests that overflowed from the choked room into the hall. "My God, Ismael! What have you arrested Pennington for?"

Ismael looked up from the letter he was perusing, and said mildly, "This is the murderer, tuan."

An exclamation of incredulity spread through the room and found voice in Campbell's shocked, "Impossible!"

With three strides he was towering above the dazed man who, half-lying, half sitting, sprawled against the bed. As the officer bent over Pennington, the governess, mistaking his intentions, suddenly screamed, "Don't let him go, you fool! If it hadn't been for him——" she pointed a shaking finger at Ismael, "I'd have been killed too. Look at this!" She bared her throat where the brutal prints of Pennington's fingers were clearly visible.

Campbell stared blankly from the girl to the prisoner and then turned to his assistant. "What happened, Ismael? How did you get him?"

"The mem speaks truly. Tuan Pennington tried to kill her. Fortunately," he made a deprecating gesture, "I was near."

"But why, Ismael, why? He didn't even know them. Look, here's a cable about him from Scotland

Yard. They gave him a splendid write-up. He is one of the most prominent and wealthy men in England, slated for a baronetcy, and all that. They say he took this trip to recuperate from a break-down caused by paresis."

"Paresis, that is the cause, tuan. Dr. Turner told me how it turns a man's mind. I talked with him about it. This letter explains the motive for the murders."

Campbell took it eagerly, and began softly to read. The still incredulous guests, who had been joined by Carol and John Townsend, moved forward to catch the words:

"'You think you are going away to-morrow, back to England where the poor fools are going to make you a lord. But they won't, not when I tell all I know. What will that woman, Lady Emily, and her stuck-up daughter say when they know you are a bigamist? They won't care about the way you treated my mother and me—leaving us to starve. You murdered my mother just as surely as if you had put a bullet through her head. All that will bother them is the disgrace of having people know that you aren't married to her. That you have been living in sin all these years. None of you will be able to hold your heads up after that, and that chit won't find anyone who will marry her, for all her big eyes. Damn you all!' It is just signed 'K'."

Campbell looked up perplexed as he finished reading, but before he could ask any of the questions that were seething through his mind, the governess broke in.

"It's true, all of it. He doesn't dare deny it. Look at him!" She nodded at Pennington's bent head. "But he's worse than even I thought he was. He wasn't content with letting my mother work herself to death while he made his pile, but he killed all these women here. He wanted to kill me so that I couldn't expose him, but he didn't know who I was, so he kept on killing and killing, thinking he'd save his own miserable hide. Now he will hang!" She laughed, and a shiver ran through the room at the sound. Carol hid her face against John's shoulder.

"Get Lady Emily! Get that brat of hers!" the girl demanded. "Let them hear too. Let them know the sort he is!"

"Stop that noise," Campbell ordered. "Is this man your father?"

"Yes, God help me!" The girl glared her hatred. "I have letters to prove it. Letters he wrote my mother years ago, before he decided he was too good for us, and went off. I have her marriage certificate, and my birth certificate. I thought my father was dead, until just two years ago, before my mother died. She told me he was alive, and who he was. She was too sweet and gentle to denounce him. All she did was to kill herself with work and disappointment, while he was living on the fat of the land."

"It still isn't clear," Campbell protested. "How did you come here? Why didn't he know you?"

"I came to Singapore after my mother died in South Africa," the girl answered impatiently. "We

went there from England—to my mother's brother. He was a drunken pig. Kept a store in a Kaffir village. That's where I grew up. My mother managed to see that I was educated. She worked in the store, waiting on blacks. After I was grown up, I got a job teaching in a native school. We didn't have money enough to get away, barely enough to live on. Then my mother and my uncle both died of yellow fever, and when I got over it—for I'd caught it nursing them, there was hardly enough money to take me out. I got a job as companion to a sick woman as far as Singapore. I stayed there as governess in different families. I never expected to see my father, never wanted to, but I used to read articles about how wonderful he was, and how rich, and all the time I kept thinking of my mother, and hating him worse. There wasn't any hope of my ever getting to England, and I knew there was no use writing him. I couldn't believe my luck when he came here to Penang. I saw that this was my chance to avenge my mother—to make him pay for all we had suffered." A fanatical light blazed in her pale eyes.

"You wrote him other anonymous letters beside this one?" Campbell asked, beginning to piece together the whole tragedy.

"Yes, two others. One just after he got here. I put it on his dresser when he was at dinner. The night I got sick, I left another. I thought it would worry him more if he didn't know who I was, so I only signed them with my initial. I kept out of his way too, so he wouldn't recognize me, though there was small danger

of that. This last letter I sent down by Semut because I couldn't take it myself."

"For God's sake, Pennington," Campbell's voice was almost a groan, "what did you kill those other women for? Didn't you know which was your daughter?"

Pennington raised his head. "How could I know which she was? All I remembered about the brat, besides her squalling, was that she had yellow hair, and her name was Katherine. That was all I had to go on. I knew I had to kill her, or I'd be ruined." His voice was so matter-of-fact that even the officer shuddered.

"I guessed wrong, that was all." For a moment he brooded, and then added boastfully, "I fooled you all. Nobody guessed. Nobody would ever have known it was I, if it hadn't been for that damn, prying Malay."

Taking advantage of the prisoner's mood, Campbell asked, "How did you manage?"

Pennington smiled. "It was easy. At first I thought the Lowell woman was the one, so I went down to her bungalow after Emily and Diane had gone up to dinner. Those letters you checked up on I'd written earlier in the evening. The woman was alone." With a muttered oath, Blake flung himself toward the prisoner. Bob grabbed him. "He's done for. Keep still, he's just hanging himself now," he whispered. Imperviously Pennington went on. "I told her my wife had a headache and I wanted some aspirin for her. She said she didn't have any herself, but she

thought her friend had. While she was bending over the table in the bedroom, I slipped the strap over her head. That was all there was to that. I put her on the bed, and went through her junk trying to see whether she had any letters or papers or anything that might give me away. When I didn't find any, I began to think perhaps she wasn't the right one after all."

"Where did you get the strap?"

"Picked it up on the path outside our bungalow. I hadn't known before that just how I'd do her in. I was careful not to leave any clues around, but I didn't notice the cuff-link." He seemed quite disturbed at the recollection. "It must have happened when I was putting her on the bed. She was something of a weight. It gave me a bad turn when I found it was missing. I didn't have a chance to go back and look for it. I hoped I'd lost it on the path, and I had a bad moment when the Page girl spotted it there in the mosquito netting. She missed her chance when she didn't show it at once."

"How did you happen to meet Miss Page that night?" Campbell asked in a carefully casual tone.

"Oh, that was easy," Pennington laughed. "When I stood talking to her at the door, she told me she had promised Katherine Lowell that if anything happened to her, she'd destroy certain letters, but she was afraid to go down to the bungalow alone. I told her to slip out quietly so that the murderer wouldn't know, and that I'd meet her and take her down. I

think it was Goodrich she suspected. She trusted me up to a point, but she wouldn't turn over the cuff-link to me. I gave her a chance. I hadn't anything against her except that she tried to be too clever. Her name was Hester, you see, and she was sort of foreign looking, so I was sure she wasn't my daughter."

"You killed her with a rock, didn't you?"

"Yes, that was all I had handy. After I'd hit her, I went through her pockets and found the cuff-link." He glanced down proudly at the gleaming bits of gold in his cuffs.

"You took an awful chance, with Goodrich, Stevenson and Townsend about that night."

"My luck was in," Pennington said simply. "I knew I was cleverer than any of them. Look how I got young Townsend out of the way with that bottle of whisky. I'd have managed anyone else that interfered just as easily."

"What made you think Mrs. Stevenson was your daughter?" the officer asked.

"There weren't many blondes left, just Mrs. Stevenson and the American girl. I hadn't given the governess a thought. She'd kept out of my way. I heard Stevenson calling his wife 'Kit'—I didn't know then that it was short for 'Kitten' and not Katherine. I knew she'd come from England, so I tried her first. You see, I'd gotten another letter, so I knew Miss Lowell couldn't have been the right one. Mrs. Stevenson stuck so close to her husband, I didn't know how I'd ever be able to get her alone. Things always have

worked out for me, though. One thing I'll say for myself is that I have always been quick to take advantage of circumstances and act on the spur of the moment. I'd picked up Goodrich's paper-knife one day when no one was around, just so I'd have a weapon when I needed to use it. I saw Mrs. Stevenson standing on the veranda while I was talking to my wife, and in spite of all the people within hearing distance, I managed to stab her and hide the body. I only had about five minutes or less for the whole business, and if I'd made a single slip it would have been all up with me. I didn't make the fuss about the hot water until after I'd gotten Mrs. Stevenson out of the way, so I had an alibi. I always was careful about finger-prints and footprints. There was really nothing to any of the killings."

Horror stared from Campbell's eyes at the cold-bloodedness of the recital. The man's complacency was unbearable, but he had to hear the whole story in spite of his rising gorge. "When did you realize that you'd killed the wrong woman again?" the officer asked, thankful beyond words that Dick Stevenson was not present.

"Not until I got that letter," Pennington nodded at the paper which the officer still clutched. "That narrowed it down to just two, Miss Courtney, and the governess whom I'd noticed for the first time at tea that afternoon. I didn't know which it was, but I knew I had to work fast. I stuffed the letter in my pocket and started up to the hotel, and the first person

I met was Miss Courtney. I knew she was called 'Kay,' and that might be short for Katherine, too. I got her to go for a stroll with me, and found out all about her people. I didn't have time to make any more mistakes, you see." He sounded apologetic for having permitted Carol to escape unharmed. John's arm tightened protectively around his fiancée. "After I'd talked to her, I knew she wasn't the one, and that it must be the governess. My luck was still holding at that time. Everyone was out looking for Miss Courtney, and she was so engrossed with Townsend, I knew they wouldn't show up for some time. The hotel was deserted. Even the constable wasn't on guard outside her door. I still don't see how that bastard happened to be on hand." His glance at Ismael was calm and questioning.

"Yes, Ismael, how did you know Pennington was the murderer? How did you save Miss Hancock?" Campbell asked, turning to the imperturbable little Malay.

CHAPTER XX

ISMAEL made an apologetic gesture. "As I told you, tuan, I knew the sort of man the murderer must be after Mem Page was killed,—a clever, ruthless person who thought and acted with the fierce swiftness of a black panther. There were not many of our suspects who fitted that description. After Mem Lowell's murder I counted out two of the guests, Tuan Goodrich, and Tuan Blake, the men with perhaps the most cause to kill her. If they had done it, however, their letters would not have been opened and left for the police to see. At least, so ran my thoughts at the time. After we had found Mem Page's body, I began to have a picture before me of the sort of man the murderer really was. He was cold-blooded, merciless, and so I decided that he could not be Tuan Courtney whose blood runs hot. Tuan Gerry Townsend was an unknown quantity at that time. That left but four suspects for us, Tuan Stevenson, Tuan John Townsend, Tuan Pennington, with, perhaps, Tuan Gerry.

"Mem Stevenson's murder confused me very much. The first two killings I thought I could understand, but when Mem Stevenson was found, I felt the motive lay deep beneath the surface. After I listened to the Pawang, I suddenly knew that the answer to the

crimes lay in the fair hair of the women, and since there were still two blonde women alive, my heart was troubled for their safety. I reasoned that the man was killing through fear of some blonde woman whom he did not know, and that he would keep on until he silenced the right one. I asked myself how it could be that a man should be driven to murder by fear of a woman of whom he knew nothing save alone that she was fair and about a certain age. If she were a wife, or a mistress, even one from long ago, and these women all being young, it could not have been so far back, he would recognize her. If she were someone who had merely stumbled on a secret and were blackmailing him, how then would he know she was a blonde? It seemed very strange. Then I thought, ah, but suppose it were someone he had known long years ago, when she was merely a child, a yellow-haired child? And what child would he fear except one closely connected with him,—a child of his wife or mistress who had grown up to menace him.

“We had no clues, you see, tuan. In that respect this case was different from all others we have worked on. It was all guess-work. The only man here who was old enough to have a daughter of the age of the slain women was Tuan Pennington. So far as the eye and ear could tell he had no connection previously with any of the women, but, whatever the motive, it came from far distant years, and we knew nothing of those. So, I began to watch him closely, listen to

his blustering talk, his laughter. I noticed that he would sometimes stumble in the dark, and I'd heard that he had had a nervous break-down. I spoke to Dr. Turner, asking him if there was a disease which would cause a man to act so, and the doctor told me about paresis, which turns a man's mind so that he thinks himself above Allah. I thought then that Tuan Pennington must be the murderer, but I had no proof, and I saw no hope of getting any. In the meantime there was danger always for Mem Courtney and Mem Hancock. After you had gone down to Penang this afternoon, Semut brought me a letter which Mem Hancock had written, and I knew then that my reasoning was correct. I told Semut to take the letter and leave it as she had directed, and I doubled my vigilance. Of course I knew that Mem Hancock was the woman he feared, but unless he realized that truth, Mem Courtney was still in as much danger. Then came word that Mem Courtney was missing, and my heart failed me,—almost my faith, too, for I knew not which girl I should protect. Allah was good, and I chose rightly. I hid in Mem Hancock's room while she was sleeping—and soon Tuan Pennington came creeping in to kill her. The rest you know."

Pennington, who had listened attentively to Ismael's recital muttered, "Well, I'll be damned. I never expected to meet a nigger as smart as I am. He's wasted out here. That man's brain is worth a fortune. Together we could master the world!"

There was the sound of mounting footsteps, a swish of skirts and the heaving figure of Lady Emily pushed its way through the crowd, followed by the trembling, breathless Diane.

"What does this mean?" she demanded, advancing upon Campbell. "Release my husband instantly. You'll pay for this outrage!" Her eyes flashed, and her long chin jutted out more aggressively even than was its wont.

Pennington regarded her approach with amusement. "Don't be a fool, Emily. They've got me. I had you all guessing up to to-night. I'd have gone on too, if it hadn't been for the Malay, Ismael, and the girl here!"

"You're crazy!" Lady Emily shrieked. "You're mad, all of you. Let him go at once."

"Now listen, Emily. You're out of this, and you can thank your stars I'm not your husband. No, I'm not crazy." His voice drowned out her exclamations. "I never was your husband legally. I had a wife when I married you. I hoped she was dead, but she wasn't. That delightful piece of femininity you see on the bed is my daughter. I tried to fix things up so you and Diane would never know. You've bullied and tormented me for fifteen years, and why I put up with it, I don't see, probably so that I could look out for Diane. Anyway, I'm through now, with you and everything else." The woman seemed turned to stone, her face blanched to the grey hue of her dress. "You mean, we weren't married?" she gasped, unable to believe her ears.

“Exactly. And instead of being sorry, you should be down on your knees with gratitude that you aren’t legally tied to a gallow’s candidate.” Diane swayed, and a pitiful little moan broke through her colourless lips. Bob caught her in his arms, and stared defiantly at her mother. Pennington’s eyes softened.

“Don’t worry, my girl. You’ll be all right. Your mother won’t interfere.”

“Emily,” his head turned again to the large woman who was beginning to rally from the shock. “Don’t forget the money.” His voice was malicious. “That’s what you married me for, but it is still mine, and I can do as I like with it. You don’t even get any dower rights, remember.”

Stunned she looked at him.

“Diane is going to get the bulk of it, but only on condition that she marries young Courtney here. If you keep your hands off, I’ll see that you get an allowance, but otherwise——” He turned down his thumbs expressively.

“I suppose I’ll have to provide for my real daughter,” he added as an afterthought. “She’s like me in one way. She’s got guts, even if she isn’t any beauty. I don’t like homely women myself, but I won’t have to look at her.”

Katherine Hancock’s eyes blazed, and she sprang again at her father, her fingers spread claw-like. “I don’t want your dirty money. I wouldn’t touch it with a ten foot pole!”

Pennington shrugged. “Then you’re more of a fool

than I thought you. Better take it and spend it all on a beauty specialist." He turned to Campbell. "Take me away. I'm sick of this show, and I'm burning up with fever."

"The man's as crazy as a coot," the officer muttered to Ismael. "No jury will ever hang him."

"Exactly," Pennington grinned complacently. "I'm going to have the best lawyers in the British Empire."

Ismael regarded the prisoner, with calm, dispassionate eyes. "It is true, I think, tuan, that he has fever, and he shivers as though with a chill."

Campbell exchanged a meaning glance with his assistant as his hand rested repugnantly on Pennington's burning forehead. "Malaria!" he pronounced.

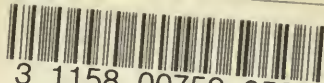
"What has that to do with it?" Blake asked, puzzled by the solemnity of their words.

"Everything," Campbell said, in a satisfied voice. "Malaria is a cure for paresis."

"Sahaya, tuan." Ismael added, "Like insects this man crushed out the lives of innocent women, but Allah in his wisdom has sent another insect to mete out his justice."

THE END





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